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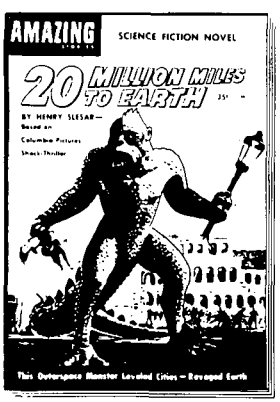

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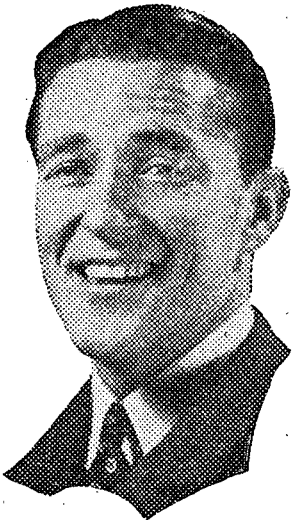

THOSE STRANGE INNER URGES

You have heard the phrase; "Laugh, clown, laugh." Well, that fits me perfectly. I'd fret, worry and try to reason my way out of difficulties—all to no avail; then I'd have a hunch, a something within that would tell me to do a certain thing. I'd laugh it off with a shrug. I knew too much, I thought, to heed these impressions. Well, it's different now—I've learned to use this inner power and I no longer make the mistakes I did, because I do the right thing at the right time.

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The ROSICRUCIANS (AMORC) (Not a Religious Organization) San Jose, California, U. S. A.

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Cover: EDWARD VALIGURSKY
Illustrating a scene from
A HOME AMONG THE STARS

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BY THE EDITOR

I have in hand a mimeographed dispatch from an organization in California which shall remain nameless here because I am unable to be complimentary in referring to them.

This release lists various dispatches they have received from their Martian informant. They consist of various warnings as to how bad things are going to get here on Earth. Various scareheads read: *Waves of Disease. Earthquakes. You Can Destroy Women and Children.*

I will forebear any comment whatsoever on this broadside except the general one, to wit:

Why is it that copy of this dubious nature—whether claimed to spring from interplanetary communication, crystal balls, clairvoyants, or up from some wishing well, invariably shouts *Doom?* Why can there not be—just once—a radio communication from Mars or Galaxy No. 5 telling us that everything is going to be just fine? Why cannot a cosmic compliment arrive once in a while, something like—*You fellows are doing a great job down there. You've pulled a few boners but so did we and we came out all right. So just keep punching by golly and lots of luck.*

There's probably a basic reason why doom is mainly foretold, said reason being that people are more fascinated by bad news than good. Let's face it—murders and disasters sell more newspapers than headlined assurances that all will be well. And a mimeographed dispatch predicting God's peace on Earth probably wouldn't get to first base.

Well, neither did this other type so far as I'm concerned. Maybe that evens the score a little. I'm just a born optimist and I claim that Pollyanna has far more in her favor than Nostrodamus.

—PWF

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THE CAVE OF MIRACLES

By HARLAN ELLISON

Suppose the Nazarene came to walk among us and lay His hands upon the sick? Would we accept Him in reverence, or would our modern cynicism turn His steps again toward Calvary?

CRAIG DENT had taken up speleology as a hobby, more for the opportunities it afforded to be completely alone, than for any adventurousness inherent in it. Cave-crawling was to him a perfect release from the tensions of the world about him. He had grown to dislike the world with a ferocious intensity, born of disorder and cruelty he had seen and felt, and there in the murmuring depths of the Earth, he found a solace and refuge no other place afforded.

As a bachelor, owner of a fine home, possessor of a skill with calculating machine

The cave exploded with a

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flashing brilliance that was to change Craig from a man into a god.

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memory banks equalled by only two or three other young men in America — that brought him a wildly remunerative wage yearly—and passing good looks, he should have been sitting astride the very world he despised. But service in two wars, a background in part-time social work, and an overdeveloped sense of empathy, had condemned him to a loathing of the world, and as a consequence, his life was an unhappy one.

So Craig Dent had taken up the exploration of caverns.

The shimmering walls of granite and limestone, the down-dripping shanks of stalactites and their sister stalagmites, the constant silence and weird, unearthly beauty of the underworld, all these brought a peace and serenity to Craig Dent, and he found what had begun as an idle whim growing into an obsession. For only "down there" was he at rest with himself, was he no longer at odds with life.

Down there, he found no sickness, no war, no beastiality, and no desire to bite his fist in fury at what his fellow man visited upon others.

It was because of this feeling that Craig soon tired of the tourist-ridden caves in his state, and those adjacent, and began taking automobile sorties farther and farther away; the exploration, the penetration of deeper and deeper caverns became an end in itself. In his line of work, with his time and aid so valuable, he was allowed to call his own turns, and so these trips were easily accomplished.

It was on just such a trip, his last in fact, that he stumbled on the strangeness that was to completely change his life. The strangeness that began uncountable millions of years before Craig Dent ever considered descending beyond the "NO FURTHER" line in Delaray Caverns.

"You doan wanna go no farther'n them signs tell ya to, mister," the old man said.

He leaned up against the big, hand-lettered sign reading DELARAY CAVERNS MIRAKEL SPOT OF GEORGIA! TOM H. BARTLE, PROP. His face was weather-beaten, and his clothes were caked with the bright orange mud of Georgia, and he picked his sparse teeth with a long green stem from some bush or flower. But his eyes were the sharp, aware eyes of the Georgia businessman. "We us'lly charge a dollah a haid

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to gowan down, but it's slack season round now—nobody else's been 'round fer a week or so. Nobody down there now, an' no guard—that's mah son Jessie, but he's over'n Columbus, gettin' hisself tattoed, y'know how these yunguns are—thass why y'cn gowan down fer eighty-five cents, mister. But watch y'self, an' no farther than thet last 'No Further' sign I painted.

"We ain't been down past there . . . cain't be r'spons'ble fer ya after that sign, y'know."

Craig Dent shifted the pack on his shoulders, pulling down the two adjusting straps. This conversation was as distasteful to him as the greedy little man with whom he held it.

He dug in his denim shirt's pocket, came up with a bill, a five. He folded it lengthwise between his fingers, holding it tightly, and extended it under the Georgian's sharp nose.

"See this, Pops. This is a fin. It's all yours. All you've gotta do is watch my car while I'm down below." He nodded his head at the slate-gray and black Thunderbird pulled off onto the shoulder of the road, just past the DELARAY CAVERNS sign that swarmed up over the top of the hill.

The old man pushed himself away from the sign, took a short walk toward the car. He walked with a pronounced limp, coming off his right leg with pain and a shivering of the face muscles; he looked at the car and then back at Dent with wary speculativeness. He limped back awkwardly, resting on the sign again, his hip protruding at a weird angle.

"What d'you want down there, mister?

"You one of them there now news photogafers? Y'know that's twenny bucks fer pikchur rights to photagraph mah caves, y'know. Y'know I own this place all mahself."

Craig Dent shook his head. "No go, Pops. I'm just a green tourist, and I like caves. But I'm going to be down there a while—no pix, just a little quiet, that's all—and I'll want you to keep an eye on the crate. *I've* got the keys—there's no sweat involved. Deal?"

The Georgian scratched under his needle-sharp nose, and said, "Wall, I cain't be respons'ble fer y'down there," and he grabbed the five from Dent's fingers at the same time.

Craig Dent sneered inwardly at the despicable little Georgian, hefted his pack once more, and walked into the

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cave. Inside, a series of lights had been rigged, extending around a bend some thirty feet down the rocky corridor, so Craig did not turn on the miner's lamp atop his cap. He unslung the pike from his belt, and held it loosely, following the tourist-beaten path down the corridor. The shaft slanted downward shallowly, until it rounded the bend, then it went down more steeply, and a few minutes later opened into the main cave.

It was not a spectacular cave, as they went. The walls were composed of a weak green limestone, a few stratas of sandstone, and here and there a dike of igneous rock had broken through to trace hard, harsh lines of black across, and down.

Craig paused there, sloughing the pack down his arms and over his elbows, letting it drop to the floor. He leaned up against a boulder, a chunk of some lighter gray rock—probably a quartzite deposit, for he noted areas of sandstone layered down on it in spots—and lit a cigarette. He could still feel the breeze blowing in from the hill outside, and he knew no gases would be around to set off the match spark.

He slid down the boulder, and leaned his head back against its cool bulk. *Oh, God,* he thought to himself, his stomach tightening at the depth of his feeling, *if they'd only stop backbiting. If they'd only stop!*

He thought of the work he had done. Of the memory banks he had installed, that had controlled the giant computer—that had, in turn, piloted a fleet of faster-than-sound jets over the Pole, in a dazzling display of America's air strength. He thought of the intentions he had had for those banks, before—

Before they had decided the effort had to be expended in "defense." That was before he had seen his work contorted, changed, altered. That was before he had seen aerial photographs of the effects the bombs those jets had dropped, had had on a stretch of Arctic tundra. That was before he had gotten kicked in the belly by humanity once more.

Craig Dent's cynicism was not something he had taken on as a suit of clothes. It was a deep-rooted striking-back at the failure of his fellow-man to live up to Dent's expectations. He was unhappy, and it was something he could never shake.

Craig Dent's big trouble—as the Army brass had told

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him, when he refused to work further on the memory banks—was that he was a damned humanitarian. It didn't pay these days. Dent chuckled ruefully at the memory, and snubbed the cigarette butt against the rock beside his head. The ashes filtered down past him, and he let the butt fall with them. With a sigh he rose, picked up the pack, and shrugged into it, feeling the snugness of the shoulder straps. It was good down here. Quiet, restful.

He trudged on, crossing the main cavern, and selecting the passage running off it straight ahead, across the room. The lights continued into a different passage illuminating his way.

As he entered the corridor of rock, he stooped slightly to gain entrance, and snapped on the miner's lamp on his cap. The lamp threw a straight, sharp beam of yellow-white brilliance across the wall of the passage, and he could see that tourists had been here, too. But the footprints eased away less than forty feet down the corridor, as though the people who had thought to brave the unlighted passage, had changed their minds. He saw the stub of a candle, and smiled; without the proper equipment, it was reckless trying to explore these caves.

He went on.

The cave was slightly smaller than he had expected it to be, as he wound down the passage—going ever downward, he was certain—and he was forced to bend over more and more. Till finally he came to a place where the cave angled sharply and as he turned the corner, found himself at an even tinier cave entrance. He was forced to get down on hands and knees and crawl along this next passage, the light flooding everything ahead of him. The rocks were getting more interesting here. A gneiss of some spectacular sort sparkled and glittered as the miner's light played across it, and Craig Dent crawled along steadily, hardly realizing the passage of time, or the world above the caverns. This was his element; this was peace and self-dependency. He crawled on steadily.

An hour later, the corridor began to grow larger, and he was able, after a time, to stand again. By this time he had penetrated farther into Delaray Caverns than he was sure anyone else had—with the exception of the initial discoverers—for only occasionally did he find a directional

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arrow scratched on the wall, or a chewing gum wrapper, or a burnt-out flash bulb. Then the corridor opened up once more, into a secondary cave, slightly smaller than the main cave.

Craig came out onto the ledge, and dropped the few feet to the floor of the cave, noting there were sandy deposits along the expanse. Some primeval river had more than likely rumbled through here.

Then he saw the sign.

Boldly lettered by hand, in red paint, the sign was caught dead full in the glare of his lamp, and he read the words NO FURTHER! UNEXPLORED! with a smile. This was what he had been waiting for. The thrill of tramping over already explored underground was small . . . but a virgin find. That was something else entirely. He walked past the sign, and saw there was good reason for it.

No more passages opened off the cave, but a pit—some fifty feet in diameter—lay bare in the floor, with a roped barrier around it. He leaned over, flashed the light down, and was pleased to see nothing but darkness at the end of the beam's range. The beam was an eighty-footer. No wonder the limping Georgian aboveground had warned him against going beyond the sign. Well, that was precisely why Craig Dent had slipped the old man a five, instead of a one. He did not want to be disturbed; the automobile didn't need *that* much watching.

He stepped over the rope barrier, stood for a moment on the lip of the pit. Around the edges his light picked out gouges and depressions almost perfect for climbing down. With the crampons on his boots, the pike, and the light, it would be less dangerous than driving that confounded Georgia highway, exploring the rest of this cavern.

He sat down, dangling his legs into the pit, and attached the crampon spikes to his boots. They fit snugly, and he stood up once more, smacking his feet flat to make certain they were on properly. He reached behind his back to make certain the piton was securely attached to his pack, in case he needed it to drive into the wall, to lower himself at a sheer place. It was there, and he felt ready.

With care he studied the wall of the pit with the lamp, and when he had planned his descent for the first thirty-five feet, he lowered himself over the side.

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His fingers in their tough hide gloves hooked into the tiny holes and apertures, his spiked feet dug at the smooth places on the wall, and he soon had no trouble co-ordinating his movements so that he was making excellent time.

I wish I'd had enough rope, he thought. *I'd have hooked the piton and lowered myself that way.*

He smiled in the darkness beneath his cap light, *But it doesn't really matter, I suppose. I'd rather make it this way, anyhow.* He continued to descend.

It took six hours to make the slow descent to the floor of the pit. Six hours in which he paused only four times, anchoring himself by wedging his legs and back against a small incurve of the pit. Oddly enough, by the time he hit the bottom, he was not in the least tired. His legs ached, and the leather had been worn from the tips of his glove fingers, but other than that, he was fresh and ready to go on.

He shone the light around, and was gratified to see several branching tunnels leading off from the bottom of the pit; to Craig they appeared to be lava dikes that had been filled, and somehow broken loose and emptied of their igneous content at some upheaval point in this formation's history.

The rock was new to him, however.

Though decidedly not a geologist, he had become familiar enough with rocks and minerals during his cave-crawling expeditions to recognize most formations. But this rock was just the other side of familiar to him. It was a deep green—almost an emerald—color, shot through magnificently with streaks of blood-red and a deep blue-green, almost like the strangest seawater Craig had ever seen. The rock perplexed him, and pleased him, at the same time. Its oddness worried him, for though he knew a great deal about speleology, he knew very little indeed about the volcanic activity of the Earth's crust, and had—as a consequence—a layman's fear of sudden, inexplicable eruptions. On the other side of the ledger, the rock pleased him both for its beauty and weirdness and for the possible fact that it might be a new find. He touched the rock with an ungloved, tentative hand.

It was warm.

He drew his hand back, and pursed his lips. This was becoming more than a cave-

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hunting expedition. There was something new and marvelous here. He turned and stared down the routing passages, one to the left, one to the center-right. Both were dark, and the beam of the headlamp flashed off a curve in the rocks only a few feet inside each of them. That meant they wound . . . and probably descended.

He chose the right hand one, for no particular reason. If it dead-ended, he could always retrace his steps—having made path-chinks in the wall with the pike—and explore the left-handed one. He set out.

A few seconds after he had entered the passage, he was out of sight of the pit. He was in unexplored, virgin cavern. Alone, and shot through with the thrill of exploration.

Craig Dent aimed the lamp higher, trying to see if the roof of the passage widened out ahead. Then he felt the chill.

Just as he raised his eyes toward the ceiling—which did *not* rise—he felt a distinct coldness rummage through him, deeper than any superficial chill. It was not, in fact, on the outside of his body, but in his vitals. Something, not of fear or emotion, but tangible, as though a block of ice had been dropped into his circulatory system. He shook his head slightly, trying to think the chill away, but it was there, going up and down, fluctuating like some sort of current, and he was unable to rid himself of it.

He pursed his lips again in concentration, wondering if he should go on, or turn back. But by then, of course, it was too late. By then, the rock was doing its work, and he could not have left had he wanted to do so.

He decided to go on a short distance, to see if there was any logical explanation for the chill. Ten more steps, and he turned the bend, and saw the light.

It was far off down the corridor, or so it seemed. Far off, and mildly pulsing. It was a strange apparition, and he found himself being drawn down the rocky, irregular corridor toward it. He walked for what seemed a very long time, passing between the walls of strange green-with-red rocks. Not for a moment suspecting a threshold was being approached in his bodily mechanisms.

Finally, he drew near enough to the light to see it was pouring from a huge, circular gap in the dead end

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wall of the corridor. A dead end, with a gigantic portal-like opening. And through that opening a strange, yellow-gold, then blue-gold, then red-gold, then yellow-gold light again poured in a wavering, flickering, stream. Craig Dent came to a halt, and stared fascinated at the source of radiance. Beside this powerful illumination, the strong beam of his headlamp was nothing. Yet his eyes did not hurt as he stared into the radiance. He knew he should have been blinded by it, as surely as if he had stared at the sun, but nothing happened. The chill still possessed him, still roamed his vitals, but he felt fine, felt healthy, felt—

Then the threshold was reached, the peak was achieved, the change was completed, and Craig Dent gave a tiny, animal moan at the wrenching within him. He was a vessel that had been empty since birth, he was a pit that had been devoid of content, he had a feeling he was a body that had been without life, until this—

This strangeness that had come over him; this compulsion that was without name or substance; this *oddness* that possessed him inside and out. Craig Dent felt his head swimming, his body tumbling, his throat clogging. Then, without warning, all sensation cut off.

Blackness consumed him, and he fell heavily. The light continued to pulse, unknowing, uncaring, eternally.

When Craig Dent awoke, he found himself wedged halfway up the shaft of the pit. His legs ached terribly, but even as he realized it, the pain subsided. It was a strange feeling that held him in its power now. He could not remember coming back the length of the long rock corridor, nor starting to climb this shaft. He remembered only the all-consuming light that flickered behind his eyes, still, and which had caused him to faint. Yes, that was it. He had fainted, and somehow had walked in his sleep. He had to get back aboveground and go . . . go . . . where? He abruptly realized he did not *know* why he had to get out of the cave. As he let his mind wander over the terrain of his thoughts, he realized he knew *nothing!* No particulars. He knew who he was all right—Craig Dent—but he did not know where he was, or what he was going to do, or where he had come from. All he knew was that there was a

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fabric that covered the Universe, a fabric that had a few flaws in it, and he had to set those flaws into correction. That was all he knew—that and the light. His mind pulsed as the light had pulsed, and he started climbing again, pulling himself up over the rocks, and finding his hands did not grow tired this time, as they had when he had descended (*had* he descended? Yes, he *must* have), and been so dissatisfied with life. Had he been unhappy? Yes, he remembered now—things were coming back ever so slowly—yes, he *had* been unhappy; with life, with the way the world was run, with his fellow men. But that was all past now. Now everything was all right; now he would go back and see what the world could offer.

Even as he climbed, steadily, yet not tiring himself, his memory returned, and he sighed deeply with relief. For a few minutes it had been as though he had lost something very dear, and now had suddenly found it. By the time he reached the main cave, with the rope barrier, he was himself again.

Not *quite* himself; he was himself-plus.

He still felt odd, and the light still beat, behind his eyes. He still knew there was a fabric that covered the Universe, and that he had to correct any flaws in it. But that was all part of a nebulous other-thing, that did not affect him right now. For now—he was hungry. He was very hungry, and he would tool the Thunderbird down the Georgia road till he hit a diner, and feed up.

That was for right now. He climbed out of the pit, and realized as he stood up, that he had left the pick somewhere down below—that he had managed to climb a staggering distance without its aid. For a second it frightened him, then that feeling passed, he chuckled softly, and started to make his way outside.

As he came out of the cave, he saw that it was just getting light. The orange-red loam of the eroded Georgia hills was barely beginning to glow in the blue-gray light of early morning. *I must have been out longer than I thought,* he mused.

It was chilly, and all around the hill cicadas and small birds vied for the chirruping championship. Craig left the shadow of the cave and came out into the breaking light. The Georgian—Tom Bartle—was not in sight. *I expected as*

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much, Dent began to think, but the thought was stopped before completion, and he shrugged good - humoredly. "What's it matter," he answered himself aloud. He went to the Thunderbird, now covered with dew, and got behind the wheel after unlocking the trunk and throwing the pack in. He turned the car onto the road, and began to pull out.

"Hey! Hey there you! Hey, wait a minute!" It was the froggy voice of Tom Bartle, and Craig let the motor idle as the man came across the road, puffing, and leaned in at the window. His limp was more pronounced in the early morning cold.

"Hey, where you been? You g'wan into town or somethin'?"

Craig looked at him with amusement. "Town? Why, no, I just came out of the caves. Had a fine time; thank you for allowing me to go in today."

Bartle's face was a mass of amazement. His bushy eyebrows crawled like inchworms up his face. "Today? Mister, you're crazy. Where you been the last week?"

Craig Dent stared at the man. His neck had suddenly gone cold—not the cold of the cave and the light, but the intangible cold of fear—his hand strayed to the dashboard and he cut the engine. A week? Was this a joke? Some sort of racket the old man was trying to pull? He'd been down there perhaps twenty or twenty-one hours — maybe twenty-four at the outside, figuring he had fainted for longer than he'd supposed. But a week . . . ? That was impossible, ridiculous!

"Now, look, Bartle," Craig began, starting to open the door of the Thunderbird, "I don't know what kind of a game this is you're playing, but you're not getting another cent out of me for looking around that cave.

"Besides, you should pay *me!* There's some sort of gas, or rock formation, or whatever, down there, and it knocked me out for a while, so if I decided to sue, you're going to be up that creek without a leg to stand on and I just might—"

Bartle cut him off angrily. "Now, listen here, Mister No'therner. Don't think y'c'n come on down here and take us with some kinda trick. We seen all kindsa people like you.

"You been gone a week, since last Tuesd'y when y'got here, an' you owe me thirty-five dollahs for watchin' this yere car of yours. Now you

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better square up, an' get on outta here . . ."

Craig stepped out of the car, so infuriated was he, and Bartle moved back with a wobbling limp. Craig started for him, intent on shaking the man soundly, but Bartle continued to move away in fright, and Craig stopped as he saw the man hobbling, favoring the bad leg.

A strange feeling came over Craig Dent, once again. The same feeling of cold he had gotten in the cave. He looked intently at the cave-owner, till everything was dark around the outside of his vision, till the only thing in the world was Tom Bartle with a limp. The sky darkened once again, and the sunrise ceased, and the noise of the birds and cicadas dimmed to silence, and the light shone about the two of them as Tom Bartle stared open-mouthed and terrified as this man before him . . .

This man with the strange, strange eyes, and the face that seemed *so* familiar, yet who was he? He stared as he sank to his knees, his hands coming together in front of him as though he were praying, and the light was a blinding, pulsing thing as it came from the body of the man.

Craig Dent was unaware that he had altered, that a strange look had come to his eyes, that a light pulsed around his body as though it were a live aura. He was aware only that a man was before him, with a flaw in his makeup. The man on his knees had a crooked leg, a limping leg. That was—just not *right,* not correct, not the way it should have been—

It was incorrect.

Neither right nor wrong, proper nor improper, it was merely incorrect.

"There's nothing wrong with your leg," Craig Dent said in a perfectly normal voice, extending his hand.

There's nothing wrong with your leg, Tom Bartle heard the gigantic, melifluous all-pervading voice from the shining man before him, as the man's hand passed through the field of pulsing light.

And there *was* nothing wrong with the leg. For the first time in thirty-six years Tom Bartle could feel a vibrancy, a life, a growing, in the leg. Even as he kneeled there before the powerful light that poured from the man, he knew his leg was well, and straight, and whole again. As it had been when he had ruined it at the age of nine

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beneath the wheels of a truck. He *knew* it was whole again—the man had said it was—he believed it was—he could *feel* it was.

"Get up," said Craig Dent in a normal voice, and Tom Bartle heard the cavernous, soothing wind-rush that was the man's voice. He got to his feet, and he was able to stand with full weight on both legs. He was whole again!

The light flickered, and dulled, and pulsed out once more like the last flicking flame of a nova, and then died back into Craig Dent's body.

He stared at Tom Bartle, and ran a hand over his eyes, as though he had had a touch too much of the sun. His throat was dry, and he had a pain in the small of his back. The chill was gone now, but its memory lived in his brain. He stared at the Georgian, and saw the man exercising his leg . . . the limping leg.

"Are—are you a-all right?" he asked.

Tom Bartle fell to his knees again, and began to bless Dent. Craig felt his face go red with embarrassment, and he tried to make the old man get up, but Tom Bartle had seen the Healer, and he worshipped at his feet.

In embarrassed silence, Craig Dent climbed back into the car, and steered around the kneeling man. He drove out onto the road, and headed for the next town, to find out what day it was, and which way it was back to New York City.

Behind him, Tom Bartle leaped to his healthy feet, clicked his shoes in the air, and ran wildly back across the road to his house—set back in the woods—to call the town and let them know who was coming in.

This was a Resurrection, that was what it was. Down in that cave for a week, then he comes up and heals me, so help me God he heals me! He's on his way into town. Thunderbird, y'can't miss him. Big fellah with real strange eyes—

Tom Bartle hung up the phone, and began to change clothes. He wanted to get into town in time to see the Healer fix up the little Simpkins girl—she'd be the first one they'd give him to work on, she was near like to dead from leukemia—and everything else.

And then, if everything went well, perhaps after the Healer had taken care of everyone, Tom would ask him for the thirty-five dollars for watching the car.

By the time Craig Dent

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had passed across the United States, back from Georgia much slower than he had gone, his fame was nationwide. In that little Georgia community where he healed three hundred persons—ailments ranging from the little Simpkins girl's leukemia to a sprained ankle—the word began to spread. From town to town it leaped, and from person to person it leaped, like a spark bridging a gap. His path was one of miracles, from Georgia back to New York.

And by the time he reached Manhattan, every magazine and newspaper in the country had run an article on him. He was a bona fide miracle man, a Healer. He had done it, for LIFE, TIME, LOOK and THE SATURDAY EVENING POST had run photo-essays of him doing it!

There had been nothing like him since Father Sunday and his ilk had duped thousands into believing they were healthy; but this was something else. This was no racket, this was the real thing. The American Medical Association had conducted tests on people Craig had cured, and they were astounded to see that he *was*, literally, healing. They had gone so far as to put test cases in his way—a man dying of cancer, a woman with incurable arthritis of the hands—and he had sent the people back healthy, all traces of sickness gone from their bodies.

It was no wonder that on the Saturday morning he drove through Manhattan, tooling the Thunderbird down Fifth Avenue, the city was out to greet him. Not since MacArthur or Lindbergh had there been a greater reception.

Ticker-tape streamers deluged the streets, the buildings were black with open windows and heads sticking from them. The mayor and the city council were all there, in a reviewing stand set up in hopes Craig Dent would stop and receive the key to the city. Every high school and prep college in the city, and most of New York State, had sent a band and baton-twirlers. A parade formed up behind Craig, without his realizing for a moment it was happening. By the time he reached 42nd Street, the tail of his motorcade stretched all the way back up to 79th. It was a rare honor, a great welcome, a tribute to the city's belief in him—and their desire for health.

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For all along the way, as he drove slowly (he was forced to drive slowly; the streets were crammed with people), people thrust themselves from the crowd, their hands extended, pleading for him to heal them. Craig tried several times to heal them, when they looked particularly pathetic, but the car was moving too fast, and he knew if he once stopped, he was trapped there for the week.

There would be time, always time, to right all these wrongs. He drove on, and the city followed, paying allegiance to the Healer, who had come to them in their hour of need.

Craig Dent now had the love of humanity for his very own.

After the five hundredth healing—in an open-air tent in Central Park—CBS approached him to do his "routine" on a nationwide spectacular. Craig declined the invitation. He didn't like their attitude.

"You've got to understand something," he told the head of the network, there in Central Park. "This is no gimmick, and it's no stunt. Somehow or other — God only knows how—I've been given this power, and I've got to do what's right with it. It's not something that can be used to sell cars or beer. It's a once-in-a-lifetime thing, and I don't think, I just don't think, it's right to throw it up in compatible color for people to gawk at.

"If they've got something wrong with them, then they should come to me . . . or I'll go to them. But uh-uh, not on TV."

It was perhaps the longest speech he had ever made, and its sincerity missed touching the network head by several feet. A talent for Healing was one thing—a Trendex was another.

"Yeah, but look—" the network head said, argumentatively, "—don't you *owe* it to the people to let them know about this talent of yours; couldn't you serve more people by hitting a wider audience?" He paused expectantly.

"No," Craig said, and turned away.

That was that. Craig began talking with the reporter from *The New York Times*: "I don't know, really. I've thought about it a great deal. Perhaps that rock was part of a meteor that hit Earth a long time ago, with the properties for producing changes in human beings in it. And maybe

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the changes in the rock, the constant pressures, and all, changed it. I know it was like no rock I'd ever seen before.

"Perhaps somewhere out there," he looked up at the sky with a darkening in his deep eyes, "there's a planet composed of that rock—just shining and glowing and making the sort of rays that mean good health . . . maybe even immortality. A world where no one gets ill. I don't know, I just don't know.

"But I've heard that they tried to get down into that cave again, and when they got there, they found nothing. So the way I figure it, either that was a temporary fault in the rock, that allowed the light to shine through from that *other* rock, or it was a temporary fluke of pressure. In any case, they tell me it's gone now. I'm sorry for that. The world could use more of this talent for healing."

It went on like that for months, with the people coming from all over the world, and Craig healing them there in the cool interior of Central Park. It went that way till Craig had almost forgotten how rotten the world can be.

He was reminded soon, however. Soon after he met Verne Purdy.

The man came up to him one evening, just as the last person had been healed. It had been a young man with a bad cold, and Craig had cured it as easily as he had cured encephalitis two months before. The young man thanked Craig politely, asked him where contributions might be dropped, and when he was told there was no need for it, he walked away confused and pleased. Then the man stepped out of the lengthening evening shadows, lighting a cigarette, and walked over to Craig.

The tent had been provided by the city, months before, at no cost whatsoever to Craig, but of late the city council had been broaching the subject of a partial—you understand, just something *token*—payment. Craig had refused to talk to them about it, and was becoming increasingly worried about it. The A.M.A. had gone back to worrying about cigarettes and lung cancer, and he was shocked to find that his healing was now taken pretty much for granted. People weren't coming to him as much as they had before. Nowadays, people walking the streets would stop by to get a callous removed, or a cold cleared up—but what had become of his great work?

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Craig was in a perplexed and absent-minded state when Verne Purdy came up to him.

"Mr. Dent?"

Craig turned and stared at the shorter man. He had a bright, eager, shrewd look to him; a thin, aquiline nose and a hairline moustache. He looked as though he knew how to glide through life's waters without getting wet.

"Yes? Can I help you?" The man didn't look ill; didn't look as though he needed Healing.

"Well, maybe. And maybe *I* can help *you*. Care to talk?"

Craig spread his hands. "It's up to you. I'm on my way home." He stepped around the small, raised table he used to lay crippled cases upon, and started toward the Fifth Avenue exit of the Park. "I'm taking the bus," he said. "Doesn't pay to bring the car out every day. Traffic's too thick."

The man said, "How about if I drive you home? My car's right outside." He indicated a flame-red Cadillac convertible parked at the curb in violation of the parking regulations.

"I don't think I caught your name," Craig said.

"That wouldn't surprise me at all," the man replied, lighting the cigarette that had gone dead. "Didn't mention it; but the name's Purdy. Verne Purdy, maybe you've heard of me. I promote."

Craig shook his head. Purdy smiled his embarrassment away, urged him to the car. Craig got in, with apprehension, and a sense of something wrong, but as the solid door slammed behind him, and Purdy climbed behind the wheel on the other side, he realized how tired he was. He settled back, and let Purdy do the talking.

"You know," Purdy began as they pulled out, did a U-turn and started uptown, "I've been interested in you since you came back from Whatever-The-Hell Cave that was, when you first hit town. Real interested."

"You're going the wrong way," Craig pointed out.

"Mmm. I know," Purdy shrugged away the objection. "I wanted to talk to you. I know we won't be overheard while we're moving. Never worry, you'll be home in good time. I've got a little promotion to put to you."

"I think you'd better let me out right here . . . I can grab a bus," Craig said, with growing uneasiness. He really didn't much care for Verne Purdy.

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"Ease back, partner," Purdy grinned lopsidedly, keeping his eyes on the traffic. "This jaw is in your interest. I notice you aren't such a big medicine man as a few months ago. You know why?"

He half-turned to stare at Craig. He arched his sharply-pointed eyebrows indicating he waited an answer. Craig stared ahead, not answering. That had been bothering *him*, too. Why? When he could cure anything, any sickness at all, why was he lacking patients, while desperately ill persons went to mere doctors and hospitals, where many were dying daily? What was wrong?

As though answering the unasked questions, Purdy hunched forward over the wheel, and said, "Promotion, Dent. That's the word. Promotion. Listen to me, partner—this is a cuckaboo world we live in. Nobody'll buy a good grade of gasoline that don't advertise when they can buy crap that gives away a free set of dishes, or waves banners, or has a coupla broads on TV singing its merits. Get me?"

Craig understood fully, but he had never considered himself naive, and yet this explanation did not fully satisfy him. It was, of course, possible, but for God's sake—

"Now. Hear me good; I been checking on you, Dent. You're an okay joe. I know you ain't makin' a classical buck out of this healing bit." He seemed to realize he had slipped into jargon, and coughed self-consciously. When he resumed, his voice was modulated, and he chose his words more carefully.

"Anyhow, here's the idea. They're so leery of you, *because* you're giving it away. If you were charging, if you were obviously making a buck, then there'd be no question that you were right in there, right on the level, and giving them something. People don't like a good thing for free; if they have to lay out a little gelt, then they're happier. Do you read me?"

Craig nodded, but he was still unconvinced.

He was unconvinced at 80th Street, on the way uptown.

But not by the time they had come back from the Bronx, and were downtown near his apartment; by then, he had agreed. It might work. Anything was a means to the right end. He would become partners with Verne Purdy—TV appearances, healing wealthy patrons, putting on a circus, charging for the Healing—and his work would spread.

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The fabric of the universe would be mended more quickly.

Craig Dent was a fool. A dedicated fool.

Verne Purdy was a craftsman. A dedicated craftsman.

Dedicated to the buck and its great power.

Verne Purdy was as good as his word. Craig's work went well. In a matter of days, he had been on twelve television shows, ranging from a big Sunday night variety program to a very early morning news show. He healed and he talked and he praised a new book soon to be released which he was writing in conjunction with an author who had done a best-seller on reincarnation. He was on the radio, talking about the Healers Foundation, a non-profit organization to which listeners could send their dollars.

The tent was closed in Central Park. Craig became available for only limited healing. His name was bandied about in higher circles. Wealthy matrons and paunchy sugar-daddies came to him with fat and non-existent maladies.

He cured them, to the tune of fifteen thousand dollars the first week, twenty-three thousand the second, and up—as the weeks went by.

Then one night, something happened.

Purdy was talking, as usual. He was counting the receipts for the Healer Benefit Dinner held that night at the Sheraton-Astor. "At fifty dollars a plate," he chuckled, laying the pencil down, "that makes a cool, cool, chilled thirty grand. Dent, you're going to see some real service *this* week. We got a plan for you to go on a tour through Upper New York State, Connecticut, Rhode Island, oh hell, *you* know, all through the New England states. You'll have a batch of people to heal all the way up. We've got mayors and police commissioners and a whole list for you. It'll be—"

Craig Dent had changed a great deal. His eventual disillusionment at the hands of the very people he had wanted to heal, those who had never come to him, those who had ignored him, those who had forced him into making this deal with Purdy, had left him an altered man. Altered even more seriously than the strange light in the rocks had done. Now he went about his healing with a lassitude, with a sort of inevitability that bespoke misery within.

Purdy noticed this. He leaned across the coffee cups,

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pushed away the half-filled urn of *espresso,* and aimed a long, well-manicured finger at the Healer. "Now look, Dent, you been real cooperative. You been real easy to work with, like helping us out and all. Now I'm no clown, Dent; I know damned well I talked you into this bit, that you'd still be out there in Central Park curing colds and feeding the squirrels, and probably happy to do it. But you ain't . . . *aren't* out there, you're in here, now, so you'd better get on the stick.

"We've got a lot of things planned, and you're the boy who's going to put them across."

Craig Dent reached behind him to the highboy, and pulled down a decanter of Scotch. His eyes held a red-rimmed, soulful depth. They looked back on Verne Purdy with no hate and with no fear —merely with undeniable failure. Craig Dent had a war raging within him. A three-sided war. The old Craig Dent, who hated the world and the things it did; the Craig Dent of the Healing, who saw the Universe covered with the fabric; and the new Craig Dent, who had prostituted a great gift. Who was being led by the nose by a man he knew was no good. The war had produced a slow, uncaring personality, bound up in pity for itself and a weird mixture of frustration and loathing.

"I h-haven't been doing muchsh healin', have I, Mr. Partner?" Craig slurred the words as he poured a drink.

"You've been doing *bigger* healing though, Dent. You've cured some of the wealthiest and most influential persons in the country."

"An' when do I get to give my p'owr to the p-people . . .?"

Purdy gripped his pencil, broke it without knowing he had done it. "Soon, Dent, soon enough."

He was cut off from further conversation by a banging at the door. He rose and opened it, and one of the guards maintained to watch Dent staggered in holding up a second man. He laid the man down on the couch, with effort, and stood back.

"What's this, Charlie?" Purdy asked the guard.

"He came up inna car, boss," Charlie answered, lighting a cigarette. The guard was dressed in extremely poor ivy league taste. "Looks ta me like it's Farlow. Also looks ta me like he picked up a .45 slug someplace in his travels."

He aimed the cigarette at

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the slowly spreading red stain showing under the unconscious man's collar. Purdy gave the guard the beat-it sign, and Charlie closed the door quietly behind himself.

Purdy bent down, and opened the man's collar, pulling down the tie. A blue and unpleasant bullet hole was spreading down the man's chest, just above the collarbone.

As he probed with his fingers, the man on the couch flickered his eyelids, looked up with a glazed expression, and said, "Hello, Purdy. You don't remember me . . . Bert Farlow . . . Miami Beach . . . you owed me a little pile, 'member Purdy?"

Verne Purdy licked his thin lips, and nodded. "You don't look as healthy as the last time I saw you, Farlow."

"L-lost my tan . . ." Farlow replied, wincing at the pain in his neck. "But I picked up something in place of it. Now y-you can do me a favor, like the f-favor I did you when I let ya off the hook in Miami Beach . . . get your Healer on me, Purdy. I need tendin'. If I croak, I got a few boys know I was comin' here, and they'll make sure my funeral bill gets paid. In blood."

He bit his lip, and his eyes flickered shut. He still breathed, and Purdy felt for the pulse, noting how low and sporadic it was. He stood up, turned to Craig Dent.

"Okay, miracle worker. Let's go here. We got a real case for you. Don't mess up on this one, or you lost yourself a partner."

Craig rose unsteadily to his feet, and walked to the couch. He stood there for a minute with the glass of Scotch in his hand, and concentrated, as he had always done before. He concentrated, and he thought, and he waited for the chill to hit him. But it didn't.

The light did not flow and pulse.

The chill did not come.

The Healing power was still and dormant.

He took another drink. Purdy's face broke into sweat, and in fury he struck the glass from Dent's hand. He grabbed Craig by the shirt front, dragging him up close. He was shorter than Dent, but the power in his hands came from something besides size; fear was written in the twist of his lips.

"You save him, Dent," Purdy said with soft intensity. "You get *down* there . . ." he shoved him to his knees beside the couch, ". . . and you save him? He'll have me killed, he's

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got a hundred guys who'll knock me off if he dies! You understand, Dent? You understand, you stinkin' lush!" He slapped Dent viciously across the back of the head.

Craig Dent slipped forward, his hands clutching the edge of the couch. He struggled to produce the chill, the light, but nothing happened. He closed his eyes tightly, and his forehead beaded with sweat as Purdy's had done. The temple veins jumped with effort. Then he slid forward, his head lying on Farlow's stomach. Purdy grabbed him by the shirt again, dragging him half-erect. Craig's head hung loosely, his mouth open. He stank of liquor, and his tongue worked idly in his mouth. He tried to look up at Purdy, but he was held at an awkward angle.

Then he fell limp in Purdy's grip. He was out, and a few minutes later—Farlow died.

Nothing happened for a week. Not a thing. Purdy began to breathe easily. He arranged for several healing sessions with members of New York's first families. Dent performed adequately; he was red-eyed and unsteady, but three out of the ten people were cured. The light was coming only once in a while now. Whether it was that the power from the rock was wearing off, or . . . something else, neither knew. But it was a satisfactory performance.

Then Purdy decided to get out from under.

He arranged for the biggest demonstration Craig had ever attempted. Yankee Stadium; nationwide TV hookup; paid admission, and anyone who bought a five dollar ticket could have a chance to get up on the stage with Craig Dent, the fabulous Healer, and have their ills cured.

The publicity went out. On radio and televison, in the papers and in weekly periodicals the announcements blared the news. Craig Dent, the Healer, the man from the cave of miracles, would be available to all, the next week, in the Yankee Stadium, get your tickets NOW! Only five dollars a seat.

By the beginning of the week of the Healers Rally, the stadium was half sold out. It was a fantastic success. The money poured in, and the receipts poured into Verne Purdy's pockets. While Purdy watched over Craig Dent as a mother hen watches her brood. He kept Dent away from the liquor, and he also stayed off the streets himself.

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The night of the rally, Purdy helped Dent dress—since the Central Park days Dent had been living in Purdy's Washington Square apartments—and helped load him into the flame-red Cadillac. Charlie the guard rode with them, a suspicious bulge under his left armpit. He watched the streets as they drove to the Stadium.

"Listen, Dent," Purdy warned Craig, "you been pretty erratic with this thing of yours; sometimes you got it, sometimes you ain't. Tonight I want you should have it. This is the *big* one, Dent. This is the one you've been waiting for. You do a good job tonight, and you'll be able to Heal all over the world. Your work'll be recognized and you'll be a big man. But if you goof up—"

He did not finish the sentence because it really didn't matter to him. The money had already been deposited in his several dozen bank accounts all over the world, and what Craig Dent did tonight was no concern of his.

He was leaving the country after the rally in any event. Then it was up to Dent to shift for himself. He had made a nice pile from this creep and his talent. It was no concern of his what happ—

They were turning off Fifth Avenue, when the first two cars got on their tail. Charlie saw them, and prodded Purdy in the back. "We got a coupla visitors, boss," he said softly. His face, in the rear view mirror was grim.

"Look like Farlow's boys?" Purdy asked, his face white.

Charlie nodded. "Looks like."

They speeded up, and headed for the Bronx, and Yankee Stadium. "Long as we keep moving, and don't let them cut us off, we'll be okay." He swung out of the line of traffic, into the opposite lane, and roared uptown.

They made it as far as the Yankee Stadium parking lot.

When they pulled in, three more cars were behind them, five in all. Purdy ground the Cadillac to a stop, and jumped out. Charlie was right behind him. They left the dazed and uncaring Dent sitting in the front seat.

Purdy sprinted across the parking lot, weaving in and out between cars, heading for the relative safety of the Park and the police on guard there.

They caught him back in the line of cars, back where no one was waiting to help him. They caught him, ten of them, and one had a sub-machine

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gun. It was an Army surplus weapon, that often clogged, but not this time.

Purdy came around the front of a Lincoln, and the machine gunner leveled it at his groin, and worked up. Dent heard the chattering roar of the weapon, and knew what had happened, but it didn't matter at all.

Purdy took the slugs from belly to neck, and stumbled back up against the car. Blood gushed down his front in an unquenchable tide, and he sank his fingers into his stomach to try and stop it. He took two steps away from the Lincoln, one hand coming out in an unquestionable gesture of appeal.

Two steps, and one of the men without a machine gun swore. "Goddam him, he likes livin' too much." The man walked to Purdy, put an arm comfortingly across the dying promoter's shoulder . . .

. . . and brought the .32 up to Purdy's head. It was only one bullet into the brain, but it did the work that the machine gun had started. Purdy sagged in the middle and fell over. He lay across the feet of the man with the .32 for a moment.

Just a moment; for the man kicked him off hurriedly.

Somewhere behind them another shot sounded, and they knew Charlie the guard was gone. "Let's get that Healer," the man with the .38 said tightly. They moved back in a circle toward the Cadillac, and approached it carefully. There was no knowing what this guy might try to pull. After all, he *was* a Healer—at least, some guys thought he was—even though he hadn't been doin' much lately. Take it careful!

The car was empty.

In the Stadium, on the stage, on the huge podium that had been erected, with white banners floating out around the top of the Stadium, Craig Dent had made his appearance. His hair was uncombed, and his face was drawn in an expression of infinite sadness. He climbed to the stage, and the ovation was deafening.

Almost immediately, the bleachers overflowed, the reserved sections erupted, the people standing behind the fences in center field charged out . . . all converging on the stage, on the Healer.

A police cordon sprang from nowhere, holding them back, and the waves of sick and injured were stopped. "One by one," Craig Dent

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said, over the microphones that threw his voice to all corners of the Stadium. "One at a time, and I'll heal you."

They started up the stairs to the stage, one by one. The sick and the blind, the lame and the ones with dark brown spots on their lungs. They came up, with eyes shining, to be greeted by the Healer. To be saved.

He lined up the first twenty. A child with a great rose mark that covered half her face; a young man with a withered right arm and leg; an elderly woman shaking with the palsy; a husband and wife both dying of cancer. He lined them all up, and stepped back. Now the light would come. Now he would concentrate and the light would flow and pulse as it had from those strange otherworldly rocks. Now the fabric that stretched over the Universe would be mended a little more.

Now!

He struggled, but nothing happened. He urged himself, and beetled his brows, and clenched his fists, and sank to his knees half in effort, half in prayer, but nothing happened. The light would not come.

Then he realized, amazed at his own stupidity, why he was unable to produce the healing light, the chill, the power. Why he would *never* produce it again.

They had made him corrupt himself. They had made him doubt he could do it. He had been able to cure them all, when he was doing the Universe's work—God's work? He did not know if they were the same—but now, now he was lost. Now he was a charlatan, unable to bring the light.

A warning murmur struck up from the gigantic crowd in the Stadium. A murmur that grew to a shout, then to a wail, then to a scream, and then to an unending ocean of sound that beat back against the walls of the Stadium, and beat at Craig Dent. A screaming tidal wave that said, "Fake! Hoax! Charlatan! Kill the cheater!"

And the noise rose up and up, and the people broke through the cordon, and they overflowed the stage, and they swept over Craig Dent.

When it was all over, there was no sound, and there was no movement. The Stadium was empty, and the stage had been crushed to the ground. Not a person was seen in the Stadium, for they had all gone.

He had come to them just

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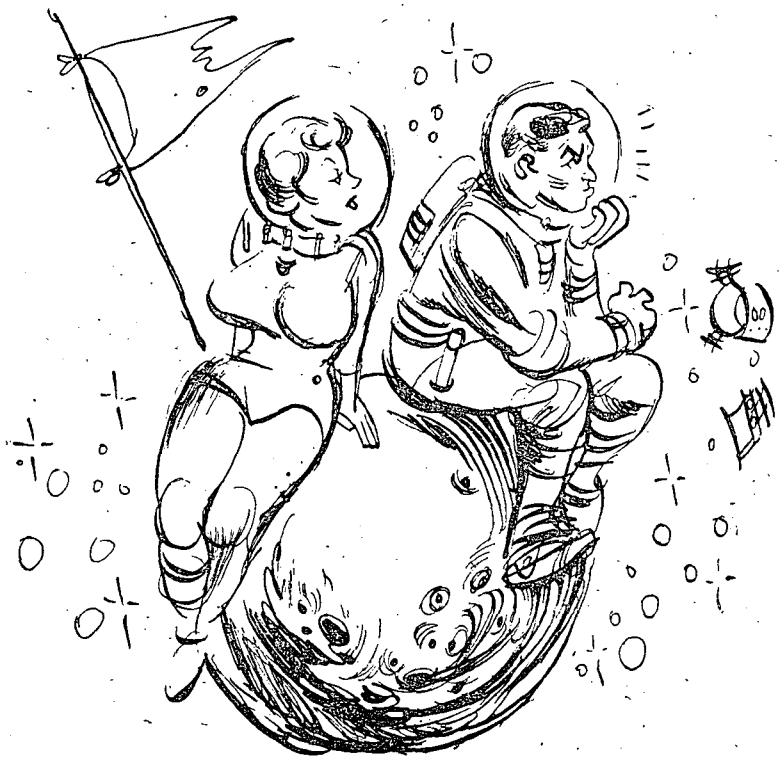
as another Healer had come to them, he had been betrayed, as *that* Healer had been betrayed, and like that other, he had been crucified to the will of the people.

The Stadium was quiet and empty.

But somewhere in the earth of Georgia, a light still glowed — serene, untroubled, conscious of its own power, knowing what truly it reflected in the hearts of all men, waiting only to be seen and recognized.

And somewhere in the cosmos, a voice formed from the same power whispered: *A little time—a little more time.*

While Creation heard and was content. **THE END**



"Okay—so we're alone. What comes next?"

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You'll enjoy . . .

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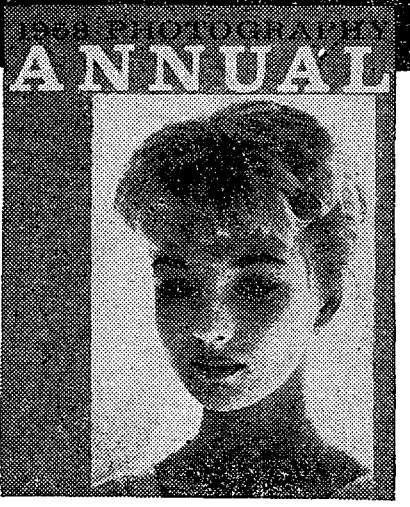

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If murder were done, there would

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be none to know.

This drama—bitter and deadly, yet tenderly beautiful—was played against a backdrop of icy mountains by a race returned finally to Earth from——

A Home Among The Stars

By E. K. JARVIS

HARDER was still a quarter of a mile away when the converted DC-3 took off.

He didn't stop running forward. Running was purely reflex now, and behind the reflex was the grim fact that Harder's life depended on reaching the plane before the jato take-off bottles sent it racing forward across the snow on its runners and up into the cold Antarctic sky.

Harder staggered to where the plane had been. He could smell the jato in the cold air, and at once he was engulfed by a swirling backlash of Antarctic snow as dry as confetti. For a while as Harder

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had covered the last few hundred yards, it had looked as if circumstances, for once, were on his side. He had come on foot across twenty miles of Antarctic wilderness to the U. S. Geophysical Year base where the last converted DC-3 of the expedition waited. He had no notion how long it had taken: time ceased to exist in a world of terrible cold, fierce winds and blinding flurries of ground-snow. Then, at last, he had seen the DC-3. Mather, he knew, would be the pilot, the last pilot of the last plane before Antarctica became snowy wilderness once more, waiting changelessly for the next expedition. And the plane seemed to stand still, as if it were going to wait for Harder. But the propellers were spinning and the jato bottles emitted exhaust plumes. For one long moment the DC-3's runners were stuck fast in the snow; then in a blinding, explosive roar, all the remaining jato bottles were fired simultaneously, the two-engined plane shuddered like a stricken animal, the runners broke free and the plane roared forward swiftly and was airborne in a few seconds. It streaked out of sight.

Harder waved frantically although he knew it was useless. They would never see him in the swirling backlash of snow.

He was marooned at the bottom of the world.

He stopped waving when the plane was a small dot against the immensity of Antarctic sky. With surprising objectivity he wondered how long he could survive alone. Cold, of course, would be his problem, for although the insulated Quonsot huts hadn't been disassembled, there probably was no oil for the heaters. There was plenty of food which had been left, as it always was, for the next expedition. And water was no problem with five million square miles of snow all around him. But the next expedition wasn't coming for two years—and, Harder thought with a wry smile, by then he would be quite dead and as perfectly preserved in the cold dry air as the sides of beef which had been left behind.

At least if I knew why, Harder thought, walking toward the nearest of the Quonsots. The door wasn't locked: there were no marauders to lock out in Antarctica. Harder went inside but did not remove his insulated parka. The dim interior of the Quonsot—Harder saw that it was Major Mather's flight head-

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quarters—was deceptively warm. But it was warm only by comparison with the minus fifty degrees outside. A thermometer on the inside wall, the line of mercury pale in the dim light, gave Harder his death sentence. The mercury stood at five degrees above zero, and it was going down.

Harder went to the oil heater first. The fuel chamber, as he expected, was dry. He spent a fruitless half hour searching for oil, but didn't find any.

So that's it, he thought. The end of Jim Harder, meteorologist. He sat down, wondering how long it would take for him to die. The big danger, of course, was sleeping. If he went to sleep he probably would never wake up, despite the insulated parka, because the insulation of the parka was designed to keep in body heat generated by activity. A day? A week maybe, with all the food he wanted? The strangest part of it was, he didn't feel very cold. But he could explain that: he was a weather expert. He didn't feel cold because the humidity stood near zero—and dry cold can be killingly deceptive.

Yet he couldn't just surrender to the inevitable—it wasn't his nature to do so. He spent several thorough hours searching the six other huts in the compound. There was plenty of food as he had expected. There was absolutely no oil. There was no point in leaving behind oil which would become as sluggish as molasses in the fierce cold.

Harder sat down in Major Mather's flight hut. He should have been exhausted from his trek, but wasn't. Restlessly, he got up and prowled around from one corner to another.

Not expecting to, he was surprised when he found Mather's log. Then he decided it wasn't so unusual after all: Mather, probably, had sensibly made a copy, deciding to leave the log here in the event that anything it contained could be of value to the members of the next weather expedition two years from now.

Idly, Harder flipped the pages. The log was typed on loose-leaf. One entry toward the end stopped him cold. He read:

"Scoby came back from the weather station on Byrd Peak today. He wasn't very lucid. Exposure had nearly got him, but Doc says he will be all right. He told a grim story, and thank God he was lucid enough to tell it so we wouldn't have to send out a search party after Jim Hard-

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er. Poor Harder died in a snow fall.

It happened just under Byrd Peak, Scoby says. A word of warning to those who come after us: these snow avalanches are pretty nearly soundless and can fall without warning from the slopes of the steeper mountains.

"Funny, if I had to name one member of this expedition who seemed damn near indestructible, it would have been Jim Harder. There was something about the man—I don't know what." Harder smiled as he read: he had not realized Major Mather was so observant. He read on: "For one thing, Harder's of that vanishing breed, a loner. According to his Form 20 card, he doesn't have any relatives. And, while he isn't anti-social, he hasn't been as close as the other men. If he had one friend down here, it was Scoby, but even Scoby more than once told the base psychologist in the routine interviews that it was difficult to find anything under the surface in Harder. Anyhow, he was killed under Byrd Mountain, buried alive by snow. He was a strange sort of fellow, and lonely—but a good man. The world needs more of his type." The last pertinent entry on that page made Harder smile grimly. It said: "Scoby was quite broken up by his death."

There was one more relevant entry—on the final page of the log book. By then the letters of Major Mather's typewriter were faint, but since it was the last entry he hadn't bothered to change the ribbon. Harder read:

". . . leave in about thirty minutes. I still can't stop thinking about Jim Harder's death. At least about the circumstances. It isn't Harder that bothers me: Harder's dead, and there's nothing more you can do for a dead man. It's Scoby. Harder's death affected him strangely. Scoby doesn't remember. Oh, it would be understandable enough if Scoby merely forgot the incidents of Harder's death, for Scoby, so he told us when he first came back, very nearly died out there himself.

"But—Scoby has forgotten Harder completely! It's as if, as far as Scoby's concerned, Harder never existed at all. He remembers taking a dog-sled out to the weather station near Byrd, but he thinks he went alone. I asked him about Harder, and he said, 'Harder? Who is Harder?' I

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didn't press it. When we reach Tierre del Fuego, though, I'm going to ask the psychologist to have a look at Scoby. Poor guy, he must have some kind of repressed guilt feelings, or whatever terms the head-shrinkers use. But of course neither Scoby nor anyone in the world could have helped Harder in a snow avalanche. The DC-3 . . ."

Harder closed the book. His fingers were numb with cold. His smile was bleak: so that was Scoby's story, and, conveniently, Scoby had forgotten it.

What, actually, had been Scoby's motives? Harder couldn't answer that question, and since his life was already forfeit, the answer hardly mattered. If he had to guess, though, he would have said that Scoby just didn't have any motives. As Mather had written, Harder was a loner, the last of a dying breed. He liked Scoby as well as he liked any man, but he had never formed any close alliances. He was too busy searching.

Searching—all his life. He never knew for what. But he was restless, he couldn't remain long in one place, he wasn't happy unless he was constantly on the move and, instinctively, as soon as he reached a place he knew this wasn't the nameless thing he had been seeking. The searching, which dominated Harder's life and which finally had killed him because it had brought him down to Antarctica on the geophysical expedition and now he must surely die, was compulsive. If he had a specific goal it was in his unconscious mind: he had never been able to ferret it out. Yet he had had to go on. Looking, looking . . .

But Scoby's story amazed him as much as Scoby's behavior, for it hadn't happened that way at all—

But they had cleaned out the small weather station near Byrd without too much trouble. Scoby a young New Englander, had seemed cheerful enough. It was hard to tell in the cold, for faces were reduced to eye-slits and breathing holes, but at least Scoby hadn't seemed sullen. Nor, certainly, had he reason for a grudge against Harder. It had all happened utterly without motivation.

"About finished, huh?" Scoby had said cheerfully inside the small weather-hut.

"Just about," Harder had replied. "Think the dogs're hungry?"

"Brother, aren't they always?"

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"O. K. You check the gear on the sled, Scoby, and I'll go feed Fido."

Feeding Fido, as Harder had termed it, was a job. The frozen cakes of dogfood which the huskies ate, for one thing, had a rotten-fish smell which became apparent as soon as the cakes began to thaw. Also, Fido—a collective term standing for the team of fierce huskies which pulled their sled—could be mighty unpredictable during feeding.

Harder finished the job and went back to find Scoby, who had been busy at the unharnessed sled. The sled was packed and ready to go—but Scoby wasn't there.

Harder frowned. "Scoby?" he called. "Hey, Scoby, where are you?"

Then, instinctively, he looked up. He saw the ice-gleaming buttress of Byrd Mountain, the vane atop the small weather station, the dazzling white expanse of snow—and a shadow.

The shadow stretched out along the snow with the low slanting rays of the sun—this was the beginning of Antarctica's six month long summer, for the weather expedition had been a winter one—and then the shadow moved. Harder whirled and saw Scoby.

But he did not whirl fast enough.

If he lived another fifty years, which certainly didn't seem likely, he would never forget the look on Scoby's face. Almost, he wished it had been a look of hatred or malice. But it wasn't. There was a dreamlike look on Scoby's face, the vague, troubled but not unhappy stare of the sleepwalker.

Then Scoby struck with the locking bar of the weather-station door. The door was locked because it was exposed to ninety-mile-an-hour winds; the bar was ten inches of hard black steel.

For Harder the world exploded with the dazzling whiteness of eons of Antarctic snow.

When he regained consciousness, Scoby was with him. They were inside the small weather hut, and Harder was bound hand and foot. Scoby still looked—dreamily happy.

"What the hell kind of crazy stunt was that?" Harder roared, straining at his bonds.

"I'm really sorry, Harder. It wasn't my idea."

"No? Then just who the hell's was it?"

"I don't know," Scoby said promptly and almost cheerfully.

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"You're going to leave me here?"

"You'll be all right. You ought to be able to free yourself of those ropes in a few hours. But by the time you walk back to the base, we'll all be gone."

"You've gone Arctic-batty," Harder said. The snow and the isolation, he knew, could actually destroy a man's mind. But the expedition's psychologist, in his weekly checkups, was supposed to find and eliminate weak spots . . .

"Oh, no," Scoby contradicted him coolly, as if leaving Harder bound and helpless near Byrd Mountain didn't matter. "I'm not crazy. It isn't me doing this, you see. I've been ordered."

"Who by?" Harder asked sarcastically. "Major Mather?"

Scoby hadn't answered him. He got up, zipped his parka, and opened the door. The winds howled. "Well, this is goodbye, then," he said, extending his mittened hand as if he were going for a short vacation trip, and then withdrawing it stiffly, almost with embarrassment.

"At least tell me why," Harder had urged.

"I—it's orders. I don't know why."

"Whose orders?"

"I don't know whose orders."

"Nor why?"

"No, nor why."

"Scoby, I feel sorry for you. You're sick."

"No. I'm not sick. I'm under order. I know that much."

Then the door had closed and faintly Harder heard Scoby giving his orders to the dogteam. After that the Antarctic silence closed in. Except for the keening of the wind, there was nothing.

It took Harder six hours to release himself, and another hour to restore the circulation to his arms and legs. Then he started out in Scoby's tracks . . .

To arrive moments too late at the base, in time to see the final plane take off without him.

Now, in Major Mather's hut, Harder smiled bleakly. He was thirty-one years old, healthy and strong, and he enjoyed life although—or perhaps *because*—his had been a strange one.

He had packed a great deal of living into his thirty-one years. He was an orphan and had absolutely no relatives that he knew of. He had never formed any attachements which could keep him from his strange quest: strange be-

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cause although he was compelled to search, knew that the search, somehow, was the meaning of his life, he never knew what he was searching for. He knew this, though—when he found it, whatever it was, he would know. He would know.

For a moment he thought of Scoby. In a way, Scoby leaving him to die had been like that. Scoby had no motive, yet Scoby had acted from some strange — inner? — compulsion. Like the compulsion which had been driving Harder all his life . . .

He remembered it all now, as if this were the moment before death. World War II. The beaches at Guadalcanal. The Japanese prison camp. Then, after the war, the back pay he had put into a second-hand sloop and the months of labor which had made it seaworthy and the years spent in the South Seas, exploring, beachcombing, searching . . . Papete, Santa Ana, Tahite, Mau, New Caledonia, the tawny bare girls on glistening coral beaches, the whisper of the wind through palms, the incredibly clear tropic nights, the stars, the brief languid times which always preceded a renewal of the strange search . . .

And then Korea. He had volunteered, of course, almost as if the thing he had been searching for was death. But death didn't claim him and the war, like all wars, had ended.

Harder's quest hadn't. After Korea, he had wandered around the Orient. A year in Hong Kong and Macao, another in Japan, then finally the unexpected decision that it was time he settled down, at least to some kind of profession. For some reason he couldn't fathom, he had selected meteorology.

And once, six months ago, the reason had seemed clear. It had excited him. Meteorology was one of the few professions which could get him down to Antarctica: he might wander the world over and never see Antarctica otherwise; it was as if the lifelong search, incredibly, had been leading him there. He'd been assigned by the Government Weather Service to the Geophysical expedition, and for the first time in his strange life he had really been excited, thinking—and not knowing why—that the long, so far fruitless search would end at the bottom of the world.

But the six months with the expedition had been a fiasco. Antarctica was snow, cold,

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endless night, endless waiting. It had been, Harder admitted ruefully to himself, a mistake. He had been angry with himself, too. The long endless wait in Antarctica, the enforced inactivity for weeks on end, with only occasional jobs to do, had left him with too much time for thinking. His search, he decided, was an unconscious ruse: he wasn't searching for anything. He had spent his years seeing the world—and avoiding life. The search had ended in Antarctica, all right, and Harder thought he at last knew why he'd never been able to glimpse the goal. Why he couldn't even come close.

Because, ironically, there wasn't any. Harder had been avoiding responsibility, and that was all.

Now he thought: or was it? What about Scoby? Wasn't Scoby's motiveless action part of a bigger picture? Especially since Scoby really seemed to have forgotten, as if not an inside but an outside power had commanded him to do what he had done to make sure Harder remained in Antarctica . . .

But that was nonsense. Harder was going to die, and nothing he could do would change that. If the quest had been, anti-climatically, a quest for death, wasn't this the long way around?

Harder slept.

When he awoke, it was too numbing cold and the realization that sleep should have meant death, but hadn't.

The door was open.

Outside, the wind howled.

Harder didn't feel cold.

And he wasn't alone.

The thing was a glowing, radiant cone as tall as a man. Harder felt the hackles on the back of his neck rising in atavistic fear, as if knowledge of the radiant cone existed in racial memory.

A voice told him: "You have nothing to fear."

Harder didn't believe it. The cone glowed and waited. Patiently?

Harder made a break for the door.

The glowing cone didn't try to stop him. The door slammed behind him and the wind swept him along. He had never felt such unreasoning fear before: he even got the notion that the fear like Scoby's strange attack on him, was directed from outside. But that didn't stop him from running.

He stumbled in the snow. There was no place to go, really, and certainly no place to hide. He looked back. He

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hadn't heard the door of Major Mather's hut opening, but the glowing cone was outside now, looking like gold against the white background. Harder got up, breathing hard, and kept running.

He stopped in his tracks. The glowing cone was now in front of him. He turned, doubling back, but the wind on the high Antarctic plateau suddenly swept down at him, and it was like running on a treadmill.

"Stop!" the voice called. Harder assumed—somehow—that it was the voice of the glowing cone. "You can't get away from me. I wanted to prove that. Actually, you don't want to try."

Harder's lungs were on fire—he couldn't run any more. He stopped, panting, reeling in the wind, and, with a sudden odd detachment, wondering where the fear came from. It wasn't like him at all. His life had been spent searching out new things, so unreasoning fear wasn't part of his makeup.

"Is this better?" the glowing cone said.

Even as Harder stared at it, the cone was transformed into a parka-clad man. The man had no face that Harder could see, or perhaps the wind-whipped snow hid his face from view. But whatever the reason, fear drained from Harder with the transformation.

"Come. It isn't far."

"Where are we going?"

"Come. I will explain later."

"Who—what are you?"

"Come. I serve you. I only serve."

A rope was produced, and climbing equipment. The wind died down, as if the glowing cone—now a man—could control it.

Harder suddenly was aware of an ice-ax in his hand. He moved forward, and felt the tug of the stranger's weight behind him.

He could not understand what happened next. The Geophysical base had been constructed on the broad mid-Antarctic plateau. The only nearby mountain was Byrd, yet almost at once they began to climb. The going should have been difficult, but was not. Harder chopped foot-holds in the ice with his ax. They climbed rapidly.

The whiteness dissolved.

Cresting a rampart of ice, Harder saw a valley—green, humid, with mists rising from it. He had read about such things—the mysterious warm valleys in the Antarctic. No

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one could explain them. They were like oases in a desert, and the best theory was that hot springs kept them warm and humid.

In the center of the valley was a round globe as big as a house. Nearby, water trickled. Above the freezing point? It seemed likely. Harder began to sweat, and unzipped his parka.

"Wait," the other man on the rope said.

"What is it?"

"Wait. I can tell you now."

"Did you make Scoby do what he did?" Harder guessed.

"I had to. It was the only way I could be sure you'd stay."

"What for?"

"Because you've finished your work. Because you're going home."

"Home?"

"But there's something we have to do. Another has been —waiting. Come."

With reluctance, Harder left the warm valley of the mists.

They climbed again through a defile in the snowy mountains. Harder, in the lead, rounded a bluff of ice. And saw a vision.

No, it wasn't a vision. It was real. It was there. Harder ran forward.

Trapped in a block of transparent ice was a girl. Her eyes were open and she watched Harder as he approached. She was quite the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and there was a serenely patient expression on her face, as if she had been waiting for him all his life and would have, if necessary, gone on waiting indefinitely.

In a frenzy, Harder began to hack at the block of ice with his ax. Ice chips flew, blinding him. Behind him he heard laughter. "She—she'll suffocate in there!" he protested.

"Really? Look at her clothing."

Harder looked. The lovely girl wore a gown which might have swept across the marble floor of a dancehall in Victorian times.

"She—"

"She's been there eighty years. We've been waiting for you. Can you control the fear this time?"

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to turn into the cone of light again. The fear isn't your fault, you see. Although this was the most deserted spot on Earth, we didn't want anyone coming near it, finding us—or the ship. Well?"

"I'll try."

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The man faded. The cone appeared, and Harder's hackles rose. With an effort he forced himself to stand still. Then he stepped back as the radiant cone bore down on the block of ice. The cone hit it apex first, and streams of water gushed away. The block of ice dissolved.

Almost, Harder acted too late. He didn't realize the radiant cone's mistake until the damage had been done. The block of ice split, the girl started to fall—where there had been solid ice there now was an abyss hundreds of feet deep beneath her feet.

Harder dove after her, at the same time seeking solid ice with his ax. The ax caught and held, but the torrents of water rushed over it and it would not hold for very long. With his free hand Harder caught the girl's arm before she could be swept down into the abyss. His own arm was wrenched almost from his socket. The ice ax slipped. The girl looked up at him with mute fear and hope mingled in her expression. This was no game the radiant cone was playing: the girl's life depended on what Harder did.

Slowly he raised his arm. If he moved it too quickly, he might lose his hold on the girl. If he was too slow, his ice ax might not hold. Yet as he looked down at her he knew wordlessly, as if time stood still and a music like the music of the spheres sang the message to him, that this girl was a part—a very large part—of what he had been searching for.

He felt his hand slipping, but the look of fear and hope on the girl's face had been replaced by one of trust—and love.

With his last remaining strength, Harder pulled her to safety. By then the radiant cone was a man again, and was waiting with his climbing rope to take them both to the valley of the mists.

There were others inside the round structure. It might have been, Harder thought with wonder, a fancy dress ball. For the people within the globe seemed to be wearing costumes from all the ages of human civilization. He saw a Greek wearing tunic and mantle; a beardless Roman in a toga; a glowering, fierce-bearded ancient Briton in blue paint; Islanders in almost nothing; Renaissance Italians in tight hose and fancy jackets and plumed hats; the whole gamut of human civilization.

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The girl held his hand and smiled up at him. "You saved my life," she said.

His mouth was dry. His tongue felt swollen. "All my life I've been searching for—"

"This place. You found it. It is inevitable that you did. It was your mission, as it was all of ours."

"Who are you?"

She was still smiling. "Well, I am Marie and I am a lady of the emperor's court in Vienna. I—disappeared—on an Alpine excursion in 1877. Or, if you prefer—"

"But who *are* you?"

The girl merely said: "We are going home."

The radiant cone entered the metal structure behind them. It floated to a bank of machinery on the far wall. None of the others seemed afraid. It touched the machinery, merged with it—and disappeared.

"It won't return," the girl said. "It had no sentience of its own. It was a robot—to help us find the way."

"But why?"

"I told you. We are going home."

"We . . . don't belong here?"

"No. Haven't you guessed what this structure is?"

"No. Tell me."

"We came—a long time ago. We each lived a life. We searched—and we will remember."

"What were we looking for?"

"Nothing. Or perhaps everything. There's a long journey ahead of us. You can get the details later. We came a long time ago, I said. We are human—as the inhabitants of this planet, this Earth, are human. An age ago, we planted them here. As we planted colonies—everywhere. We came to study them. Through the ages, we studied. That's why you seemed to be searching for something, always searching. So that you would get to see, and know, and later understand, so much of your world, your century. When we return home, when all our information is tabulated, considered, studied—an answer will be found."

"What answer, Marie? What answer?"

"We are a peaceful people. For some reason we can't fathom, the colonists on all the outworlds are not peaceful. They want war. They kill each other. When their science permits them to reach space—in the case of this planet, in another fifteen or twenty years

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—they must either seek the ways of peace, or they will bring the holocaust of war with them. It is hoped that with what we have found the mistake will be remedied, the error found, and one day soon one of us will return with the answer this world needs, the answer, inherent in its own qualities, that will bring it eternal peace. When that answer is found one of us will return with it."

"Who? Who will return?" But strangely, Harder already knew the answer.

"The only one who can. The one who knows this final century. You will return with it. But first, the trip home."

"Then, is it home for me? And where is it?"

"It is a world you never heard of. It is home for you, yes. But so is this Earth. You belong to this world too."

"When I come back, will I have to return alone?"

Her fingers returned the pressure of his hand. "No," she said softly. "Not alone, Jim Harder. Not alone."

There was a throbbing roar. With them and all the others from all the generations in it, all the searchers, the spaceship blasted off and sped toward its destination.

THE END

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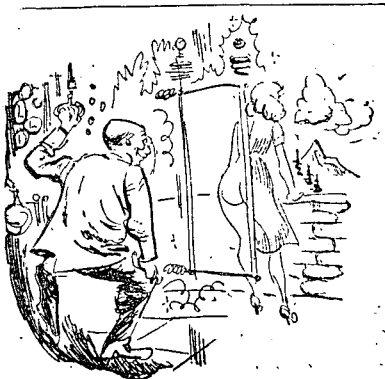

"Yes, you do have a beautiful view, professor."

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What sort of a world could possibly evolve wherein a man—moved by love and patriotism—eagerly delivers his loved one into the hands of ——

THE BREEDER

By P. F. COSTELLO

McKELDON reached Gatlinburg before dark.

The team of horses, tired and lathered despite the brisk autumn weather, drew up before the inn, their harness creaking. McKeldon got down from the wagon slowly, carefully, as if his bones were brittle as china. He was boneweary, but he immediately saw to the unloading of the big, coffin-shaped box which he'd driven up from the ruins of Knoxsville.

"It for Jessup?" one of the men at the inn asked as the box was removed from the wagon and brought inside.

"That's right," McKeldon said warily. "Make something of it?"

"Don't get me wrong, now, mister," the man said.

McKeldon followed them into the inn, entranced by the smell of hot, bubbling stew. It never ceased to amaze him that five years before he'd been a chemical engineer over at Oak Ridge. He wondered if there were enough men left anywhere, or a big enough community, or a sufficient interest in chemicals, to need a single member of his profession. Knoxville, he knew, was in ruins. He'd visited the outskirts of Memphis once, but the city was still radioactive. Nashville, the same. The grim story was the same, as far as he knew, all over the world.

"Jessup expecting it?" the man who had asked about the package said.

"Now how could that be?" McKeldon snapped.

"No offense, mister. Just

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asking." He was a big man with a week's growth of beard on his face and hard, determined eyes which McKeldon did not like.

McKeldon shrugged. There was going to be trouble. Obviously. He was ready for trouble. Horses, he thought. It never ceased to amaze him. A chemical engineer in the single great technological civilization—and possibly the last civilization—that mankind had ever produced. Driving a horse-drawn wagon up to the foothills of the Great Smokey Mountains. Horses, and a coffin with a hole-peppered lid.

McKeldon sat down to a bowl of steaming, savory stew.

"Seen any of 'em?" the woman who served him asked.

"Long way off, I spotted a few," McKeldon answered her. "Halfway from Knoxville. They didn't spot me."

The woman, who looked as hard as the oak-plank table, leaned down to ask: "You sure? You sure, man?"

"I think so," McKeldon said. "I can't be positive."

"You *think* so?" the woman repeated his words. It suddenly was very quiet in the inn. McKeldon heard a booted foot shuffle on the wooden floor, heard a single sharp intake of breath. Then, slowly, the dozen men in the common room of the inn moved around his table.

"That's right," McKeldon said levelly. "I think so. I can't be sure. But I had to bring my package through. You all know that."

It was dark outside now. The wind howled down from the mountains and down Gatlinburg's single main street, past the deserted hotels and restaurants and one-time tourist attractions and down all the way to the inn, where Gatlinburg's total population was gathered.

"You should of been sure," the old woman persisted. "You had no right coming here if you wasn't sure. Package or no package."

"Jessup is what counts," McKeldon said. "Jessup and what I've got for him. In the morning, can someone lead me up to where Jessup's hiding?"

Two or three of the men nodded. Apparently that would be no problem.

"If they seen you—" the woman persisted.

McKeldon shook his head. He was too tired to argue. He wanted no more of it. "I'm going upstairs," he said. He

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If the coffin did not pass, the lives of those yet unborn would be in peril.

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looked across the room at his box.

"You have a storeroom somewhere?" he asked. "With a key I can use?"

"What's the matter with your own room?" the woman asked.

"All right, maybe that's better. Have them bring it up there."

There was a shuffling of feet. No one moved. "Can't we take just one little look?" the big man who had first asked McKeldon about the package demanded.

"No," McKeldon said.

"All we want is one little—"

"Take it upstairs," McKeldon said.

"You got your—"

Nerve, the man was probably going to say, McKeldon thought as he jumped swiftly to his feet and grabbed the man's tattered shirt front, pulling the rough, bearded face close to his own. "We're supposed to be civilized men," McKeldon said. "This is the way it's got to be. You think different?" With his free hand McKeldon drew a long bone-handled hunting knife. Despite the situation, he had to fight down a smile. Hunting knife, he thought, with the ruins of Knoxville full of firearms. Still, firearms were forbidden. Fire was a necessity, yes—but not firearms. *They* might be attracted by the sound. *They* might come. And there were pitifully few human settlements left. If they heard, they would come not in tens or hundreds or thousands, but in millions, as they always came.

McKeldon pushed the man roughly away from him, and watched as he fell heavily against a chair and went over, the chair coming down on top of him. "Rigney's the name," the man said, getting up and wiping the blood from his mouth. "When you deliver that package to Jessup, you look me up, mister. I'll be waiting."

"If that's what you want," McKeldon said.

Four of them took the package upstairs for him. He thanked them and locked himself inside the small bedroom with it, taking off no more than his boots to lie down on the wonderful bed. He stretched every muscle of his body in a moment of pure animal contentment and drifted slowly toward sleep, the thoughts spinning in kaleidoscopic confusion through his brain.

He had been at Oak Ridge during the catastrophe. Oak

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Ridge had in part been responsible for it, but had escaped the severest damage. H bomb, he thought. Chemical engineers have something to do with H bombs, too. So you're one small part guilty, McKeldon. Not that your profession matters. We all share in the guilt. All of us. We all share in the destruction.

There were, most estimates said, less than half a million human beings left on Earth. Runaway H bomb, he dreamed on in the last semi-lucid moments before sleep claimed him. Runaway H bomb starting a chain reaction in the atmosphere, in the waters of Earth, destroying the work of generations in a moment and sterilizing virtually all those remaining. And worse, mutating the ants. . . .

He dreamed of an ant the size of a fox terrier. It was a nightmare, but it was real enough. Five years, five generations of ants, with more and more mutations. Salamander-sized ants and housecat-sized ants, and now ants as big as fox terriers. Seeking the few men who were left, because they somehow, instinctively, recognized man as the enemy, the one enemy who could stop them. Of course, man could not multiply the way the ant could, especially since the Disaster. Man was outnumbered, millions to one, and but for such as McKeldon's package, would be doomed to extinction. . . .

McKeldon awoke, instantly wary. Five years had taught him that. He was a product of civilization in a world which had seen the end of civilization. He did not awake slowly. He never awoke slowly. To awake slowly was to die. He came awake with every muscle in his body ready to respond to his command.

He was not alone in the room. The fact that he had locked the door from the inside meant nothing. There could be other keys, others to use them. . . .

The shadow moved swiftly.

McKeldon barely had time to hunch forward and raise his forearm as a shield. Something struck, there was a muttered oath, and McKeldon felt the scalding wetness and the pain as his arm went limp. He rolled from the bed as the shadow lunged again. Then he got up swiftly, lifting his heavy boot and swinging it. The shadow cried out. McKeldon dropped the boot and clutched at what was on the bed. They went down on the

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floor together. The knife clattered away. In the darkness, McKeldon got his right arm around a bearded throat, and began to throttle it. His injured left arm was numb.

A heel lashed out wildly, awkwardly, and caught McKeldon's kneecap. He winced with the pain but did not release his throttlehold. On the outskirts of Knoxville he had killed a man to protect what he brought up into the wild Smokey Mountains for Jamie Jessup. He could kill again if he had to. Jessup and what he brought to Jessup — these were all that mattered.

The fight was slowly going out of McKeldon's assailant. Finally, he slumped and went limp, so McKeldon released the throttle hold.

Instantly the shadow became spring steel. A ruse, McKeldon thought, not allowing himself the luxury of an oath. He found himself fighting tooth and nail again in desperate silence. He could have called out for help but decided against it. Too many of the men at the inn might line up with his assailant if it came to a showdown.

McKeldon was forced back against the bed, and pinned there. A fist like a sledge hammer slammed three times against his face, and his senses swam. He writhed and lashed out with his own right hand, feeling jarring contact with bone. He struck out again, and scrambled to his feet, then his knees. The shadow came upright also, and they closed.

One hand was all McKeldon could use. He thought of what was in the box, thought of Jessup waiting up there in the mountains. He swung his right fist and swung it again and went on swinging until the breath rasped through his throat and he could barely stand upright, until he realized he was swinging at nothing. . . .

With shaking hands McKeldon lit his kerosene lamp. There were no generators for electricity, of course.

He bent over the unconscious man and stared at his bloody, swollen face. He had seen the face before, earlier this evening, downstairs in the inn's common room. But it was not Rigney. A wave of disappointment engulfed him, because he knew Rigney too would be trouble, sooner or later. He was hoping this man would be Rigney, to have done with it.

McKeldon examined the box, which had not been molested. Then he dragged

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the unconscious man from the room, locked the door from the outside, and carried him downstairs. He lit a lamp and waited. Soon the old woman, wrapped in a coarse robe, came.

"Yes?" she demanded. "What happened?"

McKeldon jerked his head toward the man, whom he'd stretched out on the floor before the dying fire. "Busted into my room," he said.

"I'm sorry," the woman said.

"What about Rigney?" McKeldon asked her. While speaking, he pulled a curtain sash from the window and bound the unconscious man hand and foot. Then the woman saw the blood on his arm and without a word brought a pot of water from the fire and began to clean it. When she had bandaged his arm and fashioned a sling for it, she said in a quiet voice:

"That's my name too. Rigney."

"But—"

"The man Rigney is my son. So what about him?"

"I'll fight with my life to bring this box through to Jessup. You know that. You all ought to be willing to do the same. What about your son?"

"I—"

"What about him?"

The woman looked at the fire. Then, her face still hard as rock, she began to cry. She made a noise in her throat and it was so much like an animal sound that it startled McKeldon. Then she said: "He ain't here!"

McKeldon said: "You think he's waiting for me on the trail somewhere?"

The woman shrugged, wiping the tears from her dirt-streaked face. "He's excited over what you got," she said. "Who wouldn't be?"

McKeldon let that pass. "If he tries anything I'll kill him."

"Maybe he just ran away because he didn't want to face what—what you got. What he can't have. Yeah, that's probably what he did."

"You think so?"

The woman shook her head slowly. "Not hardly. Please, mister. He don't mean no harm. Please, mister. If he comes after you, don't kill him. Please."

McKeldon didn't answer. Instead he asked: "Who's going to guide me up to Jessup's place."

The woman said: "I will."

"I don't know if I'd like that."

"Well, I will anyhow. You

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can take me or leave me. But you won't get anyone else."

"What about him?" McKeldon said, indicating with a jerk of his thumb the bound man who was just now regaining consciousness.

"Jake Vardig? You don't have to worry none about Jake. When he's whupped the fight goes out of him quick enough."

"Long trip to Jessup's place?"

"Sunup to sundown."

"We'll leave at sunup," McKeldon said.

"I kind of figured we would."

"What if we meet your boy on the road, Mrs. Rigney?"

She didn't answer him. Finally he had to say: "Well?"

"I'm sorry. It's just that—no one's called me that in a long time. Seems just ages. Mrs. Rigney."

"Well, what about it?"

"That's why I'm going, mister. If he sees me along, maybe he won't try nothing."

"Let's get some sleep," McKeldon said.

"I reckon."

McKeldon went upstairs to his room, opened the door, then locked it behind him. He lay on the bed with his hands across his chest, the wounded left arm feeling numb and painful. He did not sleep at all.

Mrs. Rigney had the team ready for him in the morning, harnessed and fed. Frost stiffened the ground with white, McKeldon's breath came in a long white plume, and the horses stamped their legs for warmth.

"Got some coffee for you," Mrs. Rigney said.

"Thank you," McKeldon said.

While he drank she told him, "I don't know much who you are or where you come from, mister. But I figure the way you do: what you're doing is important. It's the most important thing."

"Thank you," McKeldon said again, finishing the coffee.

"What I'm trying to say, I reckon I'd take my place by your side and fight, if I had to."

McKeldon nodded. There was nothing to say. He watched while four men brought the big box outside and placed it in the wagon. Their hands were trembling — perhaps with the cold.

"Seen my boy?" Mrs. Rigney demanded.

"Nope," one of them said promptly. The others nodded. McKeldon climbed in front of

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the rig, and Mrs. Rigney swung up alongside.

"How's the arm?"

"Numb."

"You want me to drive?"

"I can handle them."

McKeldon lifted the reins and brought them down. "Get going!" he said. The horses plodded slowly across the frost covered ground toward the entrance to what had been a National Park, when there was a nation. The ground climbed steeply, and would climb all day.

"Highest mountain around here's Clingman's Dome," Mrs. Rigney said. "Used to have a parking area for cars flattened off near the top. Few hundred feet from there, a rest house. Jessup lives up there."

"All right," McKeldon said.

"About twenty miles. Most all of it up hill."

"All right," McKeldon said again.

"Say, what's eating you?"

"Nothing," McKeldon said. Nothing, he thought bitterly. It was everything. It was the whole world to him. But of course he couldn't use his fists to fight it, as the man last night had, as Mrs. Rigney's son might do today. . . .

Rigney hailed the wagon before noon. He stood silhouetted in the cold sunlight on a high rock overlooking the road. In his hand and glinting with sunlight was a long-barreled rifle.

"Drop the reins," he said. "Get down off of there."

"You can't use a gun," Mrs. Rigney said. "You know you can't. Use a gun, you take all our lives into your hands. They know the sound. They come looking."

"Get down from there, mister. Get down, ma. You shouldn't have come."

"Go back to town, son."

But they had climbed down from the wagon.

"Stand still, next to him. That's right, ma. Don't either one of you move."

Rigney got down from the rock and came nimbly across the road toward them, despite the fact that he was a big man, as big as McKeldon himself. He had eyes only for what was in the wagon.

"Now back away from there slowly," he said.

McKeldon backed away, but Mrs. Rigney stood her ground. "Shoot me, son," she said. "You'll have to shoot me."

"Now ma—"

McKeldon wondered if she were doing it for him. Rigney's eyes swung from the

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wagon to his mother and back. For the moment he had all but forgotten McKeldon, who went slowly around to the other side of the wagon.

"For the last time, ma."

"Don't shout, I can hear you. You'll have to shoot me, Tom. Your own mother."

"Just get back."

"You won't get away with it. Some of our men are in the hills already."

"To guard Jessup's place!" Rigney spat. "What's so all-fired important about him, anyhow?"

"You know what."

"Get back, ma. For the last time."

The rifle swung up. Unflinching, the woman stood her ground. The man was very close to her now. Three strides away. Three strides from the wagon.

McKeldon came silently, desperately, around the wagon. He stooped, found a stone the size of his fist. Then he charged out at Rigney. The rifle went off, echoing through the hills. McKeldon swung the stone savagely and felt it hit hardness and then softness at the side of Rigney's head. The rifle leaped from the man's hands as he fell heavily to the ground. McKeldon looked down at him and felt pity welling up in his breast, not for Rigney, who was dead and had died instantly from a smashed skull, but for the woman.

She took the rifle and handed it to McKeldon. "You might need this," she said.

"I wouldn't use it. Noise of it brings the ants out of the ground. You know that."

"He should have known it too. He's dead, isn't he?"

The woman had not looked at her son since he'd fallen.

"Yes," McKeldon said. "He's dead."

The woman nodded. She was not crying. "I think. . . . wait here with him . . . if you don't mind."

"I'm sorry it had to be this way, Mrs. Rigney."

"It wasn't your fault. We all have our job to do. It's why we're here in Gatlinburg. He should have known that. We got to guard Jessup. We got to watch out for the ants. We got to give our lives to protect him, if necessary, and what he's doing."

"We've got to give—anything we have to," McKeldon said.

He climbed back into the rig. Mrs. Rigney sat down to wait by her son's dead body. "You follow the main road up to a fork. Old Park Department sign's still there. Points

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the way to Clingman's Dome. And Jessup. Think you can find it?"

"I'll find it," McKeldon said, and reined the team ahead.

Stiff with cold, he reached the old parking area near the top of Clingman's Dome near twilight. Now in the cold months of the year, the smokey haze which had given these mountains their name was hardly in evidence. Range on range, the mountains fell away, gray-green and majestic, toward the horizon. He tried to picture how it had been, only half a dozen years ago, when the tourists came here by the hundreds of thousands, their cars lining the parking lot, their cameras swinging from shoulders, their faces eager, excited. Maybe someday in the future, in the far future, if the few men like Jessup had the power . . .

He sighed and drove the wagon ahead, up the steep trail above the parking area. Twenty minutes later he spotted the cabin through the trees. He turned a bend in the trail, and a black bear came out from the trees and stared at him appraisingly. He shouted, and the bear lumbered off.

Then he heard a hoarse shout from the cabin.

He leaped down from the wagon and sprinted toward the cabin, pulling his knife as he ran. He reached the door on the dead run and pushed. The door was not locked.

The light was dim inside, and rapidly fading. A man was down on his back, his arms and legs thrashing. An ant as big as the ant in McKeldon's dream, was down on his chest, an ant which must have weighed thirty pounds. The enormous clicking mandibles reached for the felled man's throat as McKeldon leaped.

The body was glossy black, hard, somehow revolting. In disgust, McKeldon hurled it away, then waited, knife ready, for it to attack. Was this what would inherit the Earth from man? He shuddered. He would never know. He could only do his little bit. Only the future generations could answer that question.

The ant scurried across the floor at him. It clung to his leg and he fell over on his back, letting it come. Loathing almost made his hand powerless, but he waited until it had almost reached his throat, then struck with the knife. He struck again and

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again, driving the blade home. The creature's six limbs kicked and wriggled. The mandibles snapped inches from his throat, first furiously, then slower and slower, then finally not at all. Finally, McKeldon pushed the dead thing away from him.

The other man was just getting up. "Thank you," he said, and McKeldon nodded. "He was a loner. There aren't any others, mister."

"You're Jessup?"

"That's me, Jamie Jessup, mister. Much obliged."

McKeldon looked at him. He was a short, stout man. He looked soft. He was dressed sloppily. McKeldon sighed. If he stayed here very long, he probably would not like Jamie Jessup.

"Pretty good life," Jessup said. "Folks in Gatlinburg watch over me, sort of. Bring me food and all. Talk about living off the fat of the land. . . ."

"I don't want to talk about it," McKeldon said shortly.

"Say, wait a minute! Are you McKeldon?"

"That's right."

"Been waiting. I got your letter." Jessup rolled his eyes lewdly. McKeldon wanted to hit him, but did not. Instead he went outside to the wagon.

Carefully, he opened the lid of the coffin-like box. There was a hypodermic needle in a niche under the cover, and he used it on the woman who lay there, inside the box, still as death.

After a while, her eyelids fluttered. "Are we there already?" she said.

"Yes," McKeldon said, his throat muscles working.

"But I hardly feel as if I've been sleeping at all."

She was beautiful, and McKeldon had never seen her looking more beautiful than she did now. "I'll have to be going," he said. "I shouldn't stay here."

"I—I know."

McKeldon had done what he could. Like almost everyone on Earth, he was not capable of reproduction. But mankind had to reproduce—and in a hurry—or perish. Jessup had been left intact by the Disaster. So had the beautiful woman in McKeldon's box.

"I'll come for you in a year," McKeldon said.

"I'll be waiting for you. It's only a year," she said.

"I love you," McKeldon said, climbing back into the wagon.

Then Jessup came down the trail and McKeldon did not even have time to bid his wife good-bye. **THE END**

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DAMN THE METAL MOON

By ELLIS HART

The first man-made satellite, hurled into the void, will symbolize a step toward man's eventual freedom to roam among the stars. Yet, this very freedom, misused, can become a trap for the unwary.

I WANT you to understand one thing before I tell you what is happening. I want you to understand that I've reasoned all this out, that I know what I'm doing, and there is no anger in me. Unless you call the anger of a good man at a work of the Devil Himself anger. I call it the zeal of the God-Fearing! And I must do what must be done.

I must destroy that Devil's plaything before it can do more evil!

I must destroy the damned, accursed satellite!

I've known it was an omen of evil ever since those men first started telling the world about it. "Let us send a ball of metal into the night sky, the night sky made by God and reserved for Him. Let us rend the air with the sound of ungodly wings, and let us pierce unto God's domain! Let us do this because we are curious!"

They think we are all fools. They think these promises of new knowledge, of weather reports, of superior war strength can fool us. They may have fooled the others, taken them in with their foul promises, but not me.

I have had a vision.

You see, I was the fifth son of a Georgia minister, and in my youth I was an evangelist. Oh, how good it was to stand there on the platform and go into my "trance" and tell all those wicked, wicked people how evil they had been. I told them the truth, and I showed them the light, and the gospel

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was my key to life. But as I grew older, I found even *I* was subject to the evils of this rotten world.

There was a woman—damn her, damn her, damn her to the fires!—and she led me into sin. There was drinking, and swearing and all manner of evil doings, till I knew I must cast her out. I did that, and there were even some who said I was guilty of that most horrible sin, the breaking of the Fifth Commandment, but the jury saw I was righteous in my ways, and they turned me loose. Still, I was forced to leave Georgia, and wander this rotten Earth, knowing I must atone for my sins. For you see, I was no mere religious fanatic, no zealous idiot with personal gain uppermost in mind. Mine was a heavenly cause, for I had had the *vision* when I was a child evangelist. I knew I must spread the good word, and stamp out the evils that polluted men's nature.

And as I grew older, I realized that much evil was emanating from what they called "science" and the "will of the machine." I realized they were tools of the Devil, and I set myself to stamping out their vile purposes.

Oh, I was clever.

I didn't rush in as a fool would, but bided my time, and analyzed the situation. I realized soon enough that I must have a working knowledge of this damnation in all its forms to be able to cope with it, to understand it, and to wipe its blot from the World at large. So I went to a scientific university.

I graduated from Massachusetts Institute of Technology *Summa Cum Laude*, and was shortly thereafter offered a job with Westinghouse.

Then it was that I learned what a difficult task it would be to erase the blight of evil this science had cast across Man's reasoning, and his good nature. I knew the gospel could not stand up against sine curves and electro-encephalographs and the positive progression theory. I found that out the hard way; that the spirits of Men had been twisted by association with science and its products.

I'll never forget that afternoon when I went down into the plant, and stood on a lathe bench, and exhorted the workmen.

"Throw down these ungodly tools you clutch to your hands and heart!" I shouted sincerely. "Throw them down and go in the way of God! Take not to the grave with you the stain of evil these

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He looked out of his shining prison—into eternity.

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metal demons have spread. The immortal soul of Man is in deadly danger, and now is the time to fight back!

"Strike out from the heart at these sins of the flesh! Smash your machines, and tread the path of truth!"

They stared up at me, and I could see the demons had possessed them already. They were in the grip of the Devil, and they could only gape at me.

Then I was fired. The direct servants of the Demon, the bosses, fired me. "Inciting to riot" and other despicable phrases were their excuses for releasing me.

As I walked from that building on that dark day, I felt the cloak of oppression and horror under which I had worked in that house of sin, drop away. I was out from beneath the yoke and was in the light again, but I knew I would have to fight these devils on Earth the same way God drove Lucifer from Heaven.

By force.

By unrelenting, unequivocal, all-out force. My goal was a sacred one, my trust a sacred trust. I would smash these scientific implements of the Devil . . . if I died doing it!

But then, what finer goal could there be than to die in the service of the Almighty God?

I spent ten years doing my share in the cause of Good. During the war there was some trouble—saboteour, indeed!—but I managed to clear it up, and complete my missions. But it was only a beginning. For it seemed as fast as I stamped out one emanation of the Devil's power, there were fifty new ones. The war brought thousands of developments: radar, guided missiles, bacteriological warfare, atom bombs, snorkel submarines, new methods of production, new ways of science, new frontiers, new barriers, new sins!

I worked harder, much, much harder. But it was no use. The disciples of the Devil were gaining ground all through the world.

Yet I knew if I could strike one monstrous blow for God, I would set back their forces by hundreds of years. For months I cast about for that one blow to strike, working as a busboy in a great hotel the while. I looked about, and I studied the world and what was happening in it.

Then they began announcing the most accursed inven-

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tion of them all; the weapon that would leave the evil, polluted Earth, and brazenly sail into God's kingdom, carrying with it the stains of a vile Earth.

I knew that *this* was my ultimate goal in life: to destroy the damned, accursed metal moon.

I read everything on the subject. I studied texts and the latest reports in "The Satellite Story." I read the current articles in every magazine from *Scientific American* to *Popular Science* to *The Journal of Space Flight.* There was no stopping me. I prepared for my battle as I would for any battle: with the armor of thought, and the shield of knowledge, and the sword of righteousness.

There was a single-minded purpose to my action, and at times I even suspected I might be becoming fanatical about this matter. But that was all the better. The more violently I felt my Cause, the more completely would I prevail in the end.

In a few months I knew all there was to know about the satellite. I knew how to fight the monster, and its servants!

Then I applied for a job with the research team constructing a cobalt lining for the power chambers. I applied, and with my thorough knowledge, my degree, my verve and obvious interest in the Cause of Putting the Metal Moon in the Sky (Ha!), I was hired, at a fantastic wage.

They never suspected that I was burning the money! I would accept food from them while I worked on the Project, for I had to keep my strength up, but to accept their money would have been to throw myself in league with the Devil.

Oh, they thought they were clever, but I fooled them. I burned every rotten, diseased dollar of it!

I struck up a friendship with one of the guards who paced around the high, charged, barb-wire fence each night, under the New Mexico moon, protecting the foul monster being constructed out there.

His name was Pentercost, and he was from Tennessee. I had thought the people of Tennessee were God-fearing like myself, but somehow this Pentercost had been corrupted more than I'd thought humanly possible. But then, when you're working with the Devil's handiwork, it's not *humanly* possible things you must guard against, but *un*-humanly things.

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He was filthy, and depraved. A child of the Unclean One. A roisterer, and a lecher, and a sinner.

I wanted to save him from himself, but I knew I must bide my time. Eventually I would wash the blood of the lamb from his hands. I would square his debt with God one way or another.

We would sit in the tavern in town, and he would drink beer—*beer!*—and swear, and sing all manner of foul songs, and even once, once he clasped a woman to him, pressing her hot, sinful body against his own, and I could feel the fire of them, even where I sat across the table.

She had the audacity, the painted hussy, to turn to me and say, "Can I getcha a girl, honey? I got a doll of a friend named Maxine, who can—"

I cut her off. "I don't like girls."

She stared at me strangely then, and laughed. But it was a hollow, mocking laugh. She knew I saw through her disguise, had pinpointed her as an active worker for Satan!

After she had moved on, to suck other good men into the cesspool of her demonaic ways, I spoke to Pentercost.

"Thad, how's work coming on the satellite?"

He stared at me drunkenly, the filth! "Y'know I can't shay anythin' 'bout that, Esau. Y'know I can't tell ya any m'litary secresh!"

I clapped him on the back, and smiled into his drunken eyes.

"Thad, buddy," I laughed, using the vernacular they all spoke in, using their own weapons against them, "I'm not pumping you, all I wanted to know was how they're coming.

"We don't get any closer than the drive chambers, with that lousy lining. I don't know what's happening in the world outside. C'mon, buddy-O, gimme the word."

And so he told me they were nearly finished with the accursed machine. They had built the entire three-stage rocket, with the encased satellite in its final, upper, stage. Then he told me something I had not known before.

They were going to send up mice and monkeys, within pressurized sections, with robot servers to provide hydroponically-prepared food, to see what the effects on them would be under long periods. The animals would die eventually, but while they were up there, telemetering devices would record their activities, respiration, heartbeat, and

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other data to help in formulating theories about the effects of space on man.

Then they *were* going to send man out into His domain!

They were going to commit the ultimate sacrilege!

They were going to condemn the Earth and everyone on it to a fiery Hell for Eternity.

I knew I had to stop them before they could accomplish their purposes. I had to do it not only for myself—for all of God's servants, why should *I* go to Hell with them?—but for the eternal salvation of the race.

I had to practically carry Thad Pentercost back to the Project, and throw him in his bunk.

By the next week end the satellite would be completed, and ready for launching. I would have to strike at the most public time, to show these people what they had done, what the wrath of an angry God could do to their evil toy.

I planned it for tonight, the night they launched the satellite.

Early this evening I buckled on a tool belt beneath my heavy desert jacket, and broke the small but powerful oxy-acetylene torch I had constructed into its five parts, shoving them into my pockets.

The celebrities had been gathering all day. The Project was overrun with top brass, and famous personalities, all assembling like heathen worshippers before some pagan idol, to pay homage to a plaything of the Devil!

I was on hand, also, as was my entire team. I had never been allowed inside the fence before this . . . the linings had been installed by other members of our team, cleared for higher security. But now I was inside the fence, and they thought they were safe, because of all the guards. The place seemed impenetrable.

But I had been careful and secretive about my friendship with Thad Pentercost, and I knew the guard ring was no problem.

I wandered around the reviewing stand and grounds for a while, letting myself be seen, quelling the riot of emotion washing me.

I was calm outwardly, however, and no one could have known I was a Holy Knight on a Mission of God.

Finally, when the President began his address, I slipped out of the stands and walked calmly to the refueling trucks

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standing outside the ring of attending machines.

I came abreast of Thad, knowing he was going out in a radiation suit, on one of these trucks, to put the vital, radioactive ingredient in the fuel they had been storing all that day in the satellite.

I walked up to him, carefully making certain we were covered from sight by the angle of the stands and the bulk of the truck.

"Thad, buddy," I greeted him. "How goes it?"

He stared at me in confusion for a moment, then said, "What are you doing over here, Esau? You know you're off-limits."

"I just wanted to say hi and watch the fireworks from here. The stands are crowded, and they've got me shoved way in back."

"Well," he was firm, "you'll just have to go back beyond the lines. There's nobody allowed in here . . . what're you doing with that monkey wrench . . . ?"

I asked God's forgiveness for taking a life, knowing it was a necessity. But then, he had only been a Sinner to begin with, and I knew it was a necessity.

I dug around in the utility box of the truck, and found the white lead-cloth radiation suit, put it on hurriedly. I slipped the big hood-like mask on, with the glassine plate before my eyes, effectively disguising me. Then I hoisted Thad Pentercost up, and shoved him in the front, and lay a tarpaulin over him. It was bulged, but I knew it would escape observation.

Then I lounged against the truck, waiting. Finally I lit a cigarette, to pass the time till the monotone of the speaker died away and they ordered me forward to load the precious fuel additive.

They could never know I was bringing the Lord's judgment with me on that truck.

A uniformed guard of the Security Force stopped before my truck. I had lifted the hood slightly to allow myself to smoke. I don't smoke . . . not because I think it's a sin, which it may be, but because I don't like to . . . but I was a little nervous, anyone would be, you can understand that I'm sure. And so I'd taken the smoke. The guard stopped, stared at me a second, said roughly, "Hey! Jerk! You wanna blow up the whole place? Put out that butt!" I dropped it, nodding my head rapidly, and ground it underfoot, letting the hood slip down, and extending my

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hands palm upwards in a gesture of apology and confusion.

The guard said something nasty, swearing, and moved on. God had let me know definitely, for certain, that smoking was a sin. I vowed never to do it again.

And that guard. Had taken the Lord's name in vain. He would see! He would see when that satellite blew up! He would see!

Then the speakers stopped and they gave the signal to the trucks. There were three of them, placed across the field so when we started out it would be impressive.

I leaped behind the wheel, and ground into first.

The truck bounced out onto the tarmac, and sped across to the waiting needle of the three-stage rocket.

I felt Thad Pentercost bouncing around by my feet, and knew I'd have to get one of the grease monkeys or pitmen to drive the truck back, to allay all suspicion.

When we got there, the three men in radiation suits—of which I was one—fed our hoses into the tanks, mixing the precious additive to the already stored fuel in the first section. This was a recent development in fuels, which had scrapped all earlier ideas of what the first satellite would do, and how long it could stay up. In 1956 they had believed that by this time, 1958, the satellite itself would be tiny, weighing only 11 tons, and that nothing but tracking and telemetering devices could be sent up.

But with the development two years ago of the radioactive additive that gave new power to the hydrazine in the fuel tanks, a larger final stage had been planned, and they had included mice, and monkeys and TV cameras to watch their every movement, check their welfare; this was quite a development.

I stared up at the finless needle that was the SATA-1 and said to myself, "You'll die, damn you metal moon, you'll die!"

Then the hose clicked empty, and the other two withdrew them from the nozzle holes. I loaded the hose back into its rack, and saw a pitman wiping his face, preparing to leave.

"Hey, buddy," I yelled to him. "Come here."

He came over and I told him I had to stay to help one of the other men, and would he mind driving the truck back to the off-duty circle. He said he didn't mind, he appreciated not having to walk all that

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way across hot tarmac, and took off with the truck.

I ducked out of sight around the SATA-1 and found a hatch. It was closed and dogged, but I opened it, and climbed inside the satellite. I was going to have to be fast about this. I hand-over-handed up the ladder till I was in the second stage, and went higher still, till I was outside the first stage. I climbed through the hatch, knowing the telemetering devices and TV cameras couldn't pick me up in the service corner where I crouched, and began re-assembling the oxy-acetylene torch. I would burn through the plating, reach the release mechanism of the final stage and jimmy it till the wires split.

Then when the time came for the snap-off and the second stage was dumped, no power would get through. It would back up, and blow the satellite to flinders in space.

God would remain alone in his Heaven without the impertinent attempts to go to Him, these puny, evil mortals were attempting.

I drew several pieces of the torch from my pockets, started to snap them together, making certain I stayed away from the open hatch that led back down to the second section.

Just as I was fitting the thing together, I heard a strange pulsing roar, and the floor beneath my feet quivered.

I realized at once what it was, but before I could move, the ship shuddered, and the blast exploded.

I was crushed down.

The oxy-acetelyne torch slipped from my hands, fell down the hatch into the second section.

I fell flat, and the ship erupted into the sky.

When I awoke, I was floating free. I was lying against what I supposed was the ceiling, but it could have been the wall or the floor. The hatch had closed, luckily for me, because the second section had dropped away.

I stared at the big quartz plates that sighted out, and saw the star-and-blackness that told me I was in space.

I knew the TV cameras were on, and I could see their noses pointed at the cages of mice and monkeys. The little beasts were scrambling and chattering in terror.

I knew they could see me.

I know they can see me.

I stand here, holding on to

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a stanchion, and I'm looking into the screening cameras.

Can you hear me, you Ungodly Heathen Earthmen?

You've trod the path of evil all your lives, and because of that the Earth is damned, damned, damned, as damned as this metal moon I ride.

But my God has seen my activities in His behalf, and He knows His servant wants only to serve Him. He has allowed me to win! Do you understand that, you fools on Earth.

He will destroy the Earth with fire and flood and plague, as He did in the past, but I will be saved.

You constructed this satellite to float free here in space forever. You made the air supply replenishing, and you provided hydroponic food for your animals. But those things will serve me, instead. I will kill the animals, and I will be safe when He looses His wrath upon you.

I will have a long time to kill this damned metal moon.

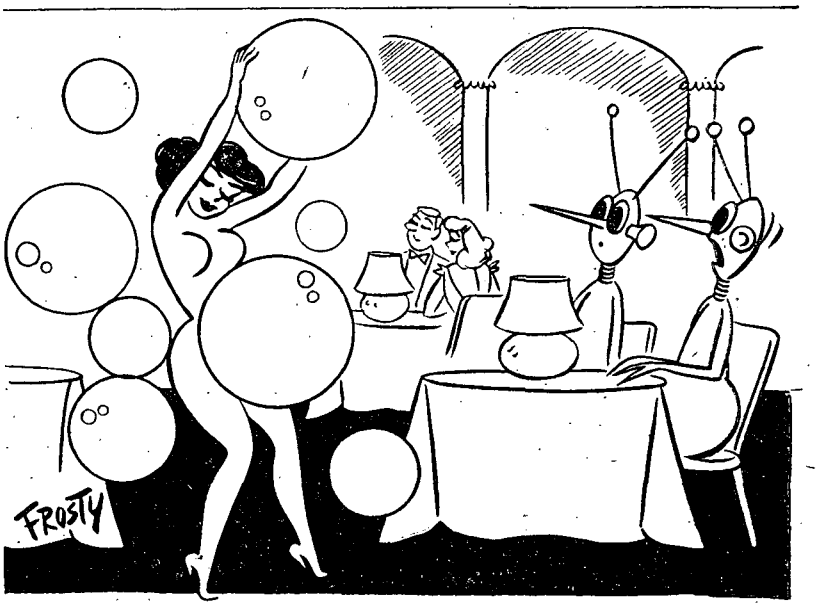
I can do it at my leisure.

For I will be here an eternity.

Alone, knowing you are damned forever, and I am free!

Free! Free! Free!

THE END



The globes must symbolize planets, so maybe she's a solar explosion.

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SAUCER! SAUCER!

By HENRY SLESAR

This flying saucer business has got everybody all mixed up. You keep hearing about sightings and meeting people who had a friend who knew a guy who saw one. But how do you start investigating on your own? Well, why not follow Bill Dover's hunch? He started looking in a mental institution.

WILLIAM DOVER was a columnist for a small news service operating out of Cincinnati, Ohio. He was an eager young man with a sharp, alert face, and a reputation for quick-thinking. He had only one outstanding fault. He believed in Flying Saucers.

It was only natural, then, that Bill Dover should get excited when a Saucer story developed virtually in his own backyard. The place was Hillsboro, Tennessee, only a short hop from his place of business, and the story had all the earmarks of being feature material. Some six witnesses had seen a blue globe drop silently onto a cornfield, and then take off again minutes afterward.

So Bill Dover investigated, talking to every one of the half-dozen witnesses. He talked to three children who giggled throughout the interview, until he gave up in disgust. He talked to an itinerant named Sawdust, who breathed fumes that were sixty-percent mule, thirty percent rye, and ten percent hair tonic. He talked to a sullen short-order cook named Jeff, whose friends had ribbed him unmercifully, sealing his lips. Finally, weary of the whole business, Dover talked to a squint-eyed farmer named Calkins, whose cornfield had been the landing site.

"Nope," he said, scratching his chin. "Didn't actually see this here blue globe *land*. Thought I saw somethin' takin' *off*, though, but it was

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The two weirdies appeared to be inviting Dover into his grave.

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goin' mighty fast. Sort of a blur."

"Oh," Bill Dover said.

"Funniest thing was the man," the farmer said, after a pause. "Beats me how a *man* got there."

"Got where?"

"In my cornfield, right after this thing happened. Walkin' across the field. Darned if I know how he got there. Weren't there before."

Dover's pulse did a mambo. "What did he look like?"

"Oh, just a man. Two arms, two legs, like everybody else. He walked straight across the north forty and outa sight."

"What's beyond your property? Where the man went?"

"Public highway."

Dover did some shin-scratching of his own. "Thanks a lot, Mr. Calkins," he said. "Thanks very much."

Back in the small hotel room he had made his headquarters, William Dover spent an unprofitable hour in thought, trying to determine his next move. He could give it up, of course, and return to the news service with the report of another failure. But the idea of facing the ill-concealed grins and smothered chuckles of the staff members was too intolerable.

He went out for an unappetizing meal in the hotel dining room. He finished it hastily, bought a local paper, and returned to his room.

He found the item on page four.

MENTAL CASE FOUND ON HIGHWAY; MAY HAVE ESCAPED FROM SANITORIUM

Hillsboro, March 10. State troopers patrolling Highway 102 today discovered an unidentified man, about thirty-five years of age, wandering down the center of the road. He was taken into custody as a hazard to traffic, but questioning produced no response. Examining police physician Dr. John Morrisey declared that the man was in a cataleptic state, and might be an escaped patient from the Wharton Sanitorium in Grover, Tennessee, a private institution for the mentally ill. No contact has yet been made to the Wharton home due to a telephone power failure caused by the recent storm.

Dover got excited.

A strange, cataleptic man . . . wandering on a public highway . . .

It could be a coincidence. Or it could be a story. He picked up the telephone and

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called the newspaper itself. He got a rather laconic reception at first, until he dropped the name of the News Service; then someone shouted to somebody else at the other end, and in a few minutes, he was in possession of the pertinent facts.

He learned that the unidentified man had been driven to the Wharton Sanitorium by the state police. The authorities there had taken the man into their confinement, but the newspaper hadn't yet learned whether he was a newcomer or an escapee from the mental home. Dover got the address and even road directions to the Sanitorium, then he hung up the phone abruptly, changed his shirt, and left the hotel.

He strayed a bit in making the twenty-mile journey from Hillsboro, but then he spotted a neat little sign on the side road that lead to Wharton. It was a bad, pitted road, and he was grateful when the car at last reached the long driveway that led to the door of the small, L-shaped building that housed both inmates and medical staff.

He slammed the car door behind him, and made straight for the door marked OFFICE. A thin man with matted hair blocked his path.

"Hail, Caesar," the thin man said.

"Hail," said Dover. "Who's the boss around here?"

"Thou, almighty Caeser," said the man, with a low bow. Dover grinned at him and tried again.

"No," he said gently. "I mean the big medical boss. Who's the doctor in charge?"

"Dr. Logan, of course," the man said stiffly. "And I, dear sir, am Marcus Aurelius."

"Pleased to meet you," said Dover. He knocked at the door. There was no answer, so he turned the knob and walked in. The office was empty.

"Where's the doctor?" he asked the inmate, who had followed him.

"I know nothing," said the thin man. "You may, perhaps, learn more from the gardeners."

Dover looked around him. "Gardeners? What gardeners?"

"Around the other side," said the man.

The columnist thanked him, and the thin man accepted it with another sweeping bow. Dover walked briskly around the short side of the building, through a white gate that led to the rear of the Sanitorium.

He spotted the gardeners

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immediately. There were two of them, in neat gray overalls, but even their apparent industry didn't seem to have been sufficient to save the flower-beds from being anything more than tatty and sparse. But they were certainly willing; turning over the brown soil with flying shovels.

"Hello, there," he said. "Is Dr. Logan around?"

One of the gardeners looked up at him vaguely, but the other took no notice of his presence and kept on digging.

"Who are you?" said the gardener.

"My name's Dover. Associated News Service. I'd like to speak to Dr. Logan." He turned way uneasily from the man's brilliant gaze.

"Dr. Logan will be back shortly. Would you like to help us dig meanwhile?"

Dover blinked. "I'll finesse it," he grinned weakly. "If you don't mind."

"Digging's fun," said the other, without breaking his motion.

"Don't mind him," said the first gardener. "Perhaps you'd like to supervise the work. That requires no effort, and every job should have a supervisor. Don't you agree?"

"I suppose so," said Dover uncertainly. He came a little closer to them. The man who had addressed him had already started a good, five-foot-deep hole. "Well, if you want me to supervise," he said, "isn't that a little deep for planting?"

"Perhaps," said the man haughtily. "But I *like* to dig."

"Digging's fun," said the other.

A man in a tweed jacket came around the corner of the house. Dover was relieved to see him.

"Dr. Dover?" he said, as the man approached.

"Attention!" cried the first gardener. The other snapped to, holding his shovel like a rifle.

"Cut it out," said the doctor to them cheerfully. "This isn't the army, Mr. Lydecker." The man looked hurt, and returned to his task glumly. The other followed suit. "You wanted to see me?" said the doctor.

"Yes, please," said Dover nervously. "Could we go inside?"

"Certainly." He opened a screen door that brought them into the same office Dover had tried on the other side. "Come right in."

When they were seated inside, Dover identified himself, and told the physician part

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of his purpose in coming to the Wharton home.

"You mean Mr. Whitney?" the doctor said. "Oh, yes. We're taking care of Mr. Whitney."

"Whitney? You know the man then?"

"Not really," smiled the doctor, reaching across the desk for a humidor. He settled back comfortably and filled his pipe, then he looked at the columnist with jovial good humor. "He wasn't a patient here. He's a stranger, but for some reason, the inmates called him Mr. Whitney when they saw him brought in, and the medical staff has adopted the name."

"What's wrong with him?"

"He's cataleptic, to begin with. What caused the catalepsy is something we don't know. Are you related to this man, did you say?"

"No, no," said Dover. "As I said, I'm a newspaper man. I'm in Hillsboro on business. I saw the newspaper account, so I decided to follow up the story."

"Well, there's very little I can tell you," said Logan. "The police have put his description out for identification and so forth. Meanwhile, we've asked to take charge of him, since he is definitely troubled. At least we can give him peace and quiet until disposition is made."

"I see," said Dover. He looked around the office, and then asked: "Do you think I could see this man?"

The doctor looked dubious. "I don't know about that," he said. "As I told you, he's a very sick man. He shouldn't be unduly disturbed."

"I won't disturb him," the columnist promised. "I just want a look. Perhaps I can help identify him," he added, knowing full well that he could not.

"Well . . ." The doctor tamped his pipe. "You did make a long trip, and anyone who braves that old dirt road deserves consideration." He grinned widely. "All right," he said. "Just a look now."

As they went through the doorway once more, Dover asked about the industrious gardeners. The doctor laughed.

"Dedicated, aren't they?" he said. "They'll be digging up all the grounds if we don't put a check on their enthusiasm. However, it's good therapy, if you know anything about this sort of thing."

They came to the door that opened into the patient's quarters of the Wharton

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Sanitorium. As the doctor reached for the handle, a spry little man appeared and opened the door for him.

"Thank you, Mr. Spear," said the doctor.

"My pleasure, sir," said the inmate. "And I see you have with you the celebrated brain surgeon, Dr. Cushman."

"No," the doctor chuckled. "This is Mr. Dover."

"Very wise," said the little man, winking owlishly. "Incognito, eh? Very wise, Dr. Cushman."

"And how is your knitting, Mr. Spear?" said the doctor.

"Fine, fine," said the little man. "Mr. Braniff is terribly jealous, of course. Thinks *he* can do it better. Ta-ta!" he said suddenly, and broke into a quick-legged run.

Logan looked after him and snorted humorously. "Interesting man, Mr. Spear," he said. "But I suppose you're more interested in our Mr. Whitney."

"Yes," said Dover.

"He's right in here."

The man was in a small, barely-furnished room, with barred windows. He was lying on a narrow cot, hands clenched at his sides, wide eyes staring sightlessly at the ceiling. Dover was disappointed. He was definitely no monster. He had two arms and two legs, just like everybody else.

"Pitiful, isn't it?" said Logan softly. "Do you recognize him, Mr. Dover?"

"No," said the columnist. "I never saw him before."

"Poor fellow must have a terrible shock," said the doctor. "We have to feed him, dress him—just like a child."

"Awful," said Dover.

When they closed the door quietly behind them, the columnist decided to confide in the physician.

"I guess I've gone as far as I can on this thing," he sighed. "So I'd like to tell you just why I was interested in this man, Dr. Logan. You may think I'm cra— you may think I'm pretty silly when you hear my reason for coming here."

"Do tell me," the doctor urged. "I'd be very interested."

"Well," said Dover tentatively. "I don't know if you've heard about that—well, that object that was supposed to have landed in Hillsboro a week or so ago."

"Seem to recall something. Another Saucer story, wasn't it?"

"Yes. One of those. Only I got the idea somehow—don't ask me why—that there

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might be something to this story. After all, it's not impossible for a spaceship to land—"

"No, not impossible," the doctor agreed warmly.

"Well, one of the accounts I heard—I'd rather not say where—indicated that there might have been a *man* who walked away from the globe after its descent."

"I see," said Logan.

"So when I saw the news item—about the wandering mental case, you understand—I put two and two together."

"And the result?" said the doctor.

"Zero, I guess," said the columnist sourly. "At any rate, so it appears. Unless, of course, there's another explanation—"

"What do you mean?"

They were back at the physician's office, and Dover waited until they were reseated inside before he broke his newly-formed theory.

"Look," he said eagerly. "Suppose—just suppose now, for the sake of argument—that a spaceship *did* land in the Hillsboro cornfield."

"Okay," said the doctor grinning. "Let's suppose that."

"All right," said Dover. "Now let's also suppose that a man from another planet got *off* that ship."

"Whoops!" laughed the doctor. "Now you've lost me."

"It's not incredible," Dover insisted. "Evolution says this is the shape for intelligence," he continued, indicating his own body. "And space travel calls for high intelligence, doesn't it? So why couldn't this outer-space creature look exactly like us?"

"Okay," said the doctor. "I'll buy it for the time being."

"Now," said Dover intensely. "What happens when our space passenger gets off the bus? Is he pleased and happy at finding this new world? Is he fit as a fiddle? Or is he maybe so badly shaken up by the whole thing that he lands in a state of shock?"

"Really, now," said Logan.

"No, hear me out," said Dover. "Maybe he's in a state resembling catalepsy, just like Mr. Whitney. After all, it's quite an experience, isn't it? And maybe the landing he made was all wrong—maybe he made a blunder—"

"Well," said the doctor, "it's *one* idea . . ."

"Now what would happen to such a man?" said Dover enthusiastically. "Would he be *recognized* for what he

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was? Or would the authorities merely assume—and justly, Dr. Logan, don't misunderstand—merely assume that he was a mental case, and bustle him off to a Sanitorium?"

"Like Wharton, for instance?"

"Like Wharton," said Dover.

"Really—" the doctor began.

"Don't jump on me," the columnist pleaded. "I'm not saying your Mr. Whitney is an interplanetary visitor. God knows I don't have any evidence. But can't you see the possibilities?"

The doctor stood up.

"You," he said, "have quite an imagination. I, on the other hand, am something of a dull fellow, Mr. Dover."

"Don't get me wrong," Dover said anxiously. "I'm sure you know your business, Dr. Logan. But just look at it with an open mind—"

"I'm all for that, of course. But yours is the kind of dreaming that's best done in the Sunday papers, Mr. Dover. Not in a medical institution, where we're trying to make sick people better."

"But if you could only hear the witnesses," said Dover. "I mean, about this 'blue globe' business. It's not like all those other wild stories, Dr. Logan. There's the smell of truth around this one—"

The doctor had stopped smiling. "And just what would you want me to do about it, Mr. Dover?"

"I don't know," said the columnist bewilderedly. "Keep an eye on Whitney, I guess. See if he isn't something *more* than a mental case."

"Mr. Whitney will get all the attention he requires—"

"I don't mean that. I mean that perhaps *other* people—scientific people—might look into the case. Just on the wild chance—"

"I told you," the doctor said sharply. "At the moment, peace and quiet are essential to this man's health. I won't endanger him because of some fantastic idea—"

"But what if it's true?" said Dover desperately.

The doctor looked thoughtful. He paced the floor in front of his desk, and then turned to the columnist again.

"I'll tell you what," he said. He reached over and pressed the button on the intercom atop his desk. "Mr. Dearborn," he said, "please send in Mr. A. At once."

"Mr. A?" said Dover.

"Yes," Logan replied. "He

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knows a little more about Mr. Whitney than I do. Maybe he can help you further."

"Fine!" said Dover.

They waited in silence for a few minutes. Then someone appeared at the office door.

"Why, it's Marcus Aurelius," he said in surprise.

"You wanted to see me, Dr. Logan?"

"Mr. A.," said the doctor, "we have a little problem. Perhaps you can help us."

"Mr. Dover here is with the newspapers, and he is very interested in our Mr. Whitney. You remember Mr. Whitney, of course."

"Yes, indeed!"

"Well, Mr. Dover has the idea that perhaps Mr. Whitney came to us from outer space. You see, there was a flying saucer landing in Hillsboro a week or two ago. Mr. Dover believes that Mr. Whitney was a passenger.

"Mr. Dover is under the impression that the authorities should be informed of this possibility. Do you understand?

"This would cause quite a disturbance, of course," said Logan. "All sorts of investigations. No peace and quiet."

"It would be a most unfortunate thing to happen at Wharton," the doctor said suavely. "Don't you agree, Mr. A.?" He waited, smiling.

"Definitely, doctor!" said the thin man. His hand went into his clothing, and produced a pocket knife.

"Dr. Logan!" Dover shrieked, backing away.

"Such an investigation would be most unwelcome," said Logan coolly. "And it hardly seems necessary, does it?"

"Not at all," said Mr. A., advancing upon Dover.

"You see, Mr. Dover," said the physician, smiling sadly. "Not all of our landings are so clumsy. Not all of them result in Mr. Whitneys. Most of our globes descend very, very smoothly. Don't they, Mr. A.?"

"Very smoothly," said Mr. A., backing Dover up against the wall.

"Beware the Ides of March," smiled Dr. Logan.

"Beware," said Mr. A., lifting the knife.

Outside the window, the gardeners stopped digging and waited. Shortly, the doctor appeared at the window and nodded to them pleasantly.

"All right," he said.

They returned to their work, shoveling deeper, deeper.

"Digging's fun," one of the gardeners said. **THE END**

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THE EXQUISITE NUDES

By ADAM CHASE

These strange, beautiful creatures came from an alien world. They looked like statues and dressed like statues but they acted like—well, we don't want to spoil the treat in store for you, so settle back and start reading.

THE big six-and-a-half ton truck took a hairpin turn at fifty miles an hour, its trailer lurching from side to side. The truck's driver gazed serenely through the windshield, but his partner in the seat alongside of him, could barely keep his composure.

"Don't tell me you're thinking of taking all the turns between here and New York like that, at three o'clock in the morning, through the rain?"

"Why not? Insured, ain't it?"

"Amos, just because you're quitting after this run—"

"You can insure a truckload of statues but they can't be duplicated."

"Is that what we got?"

These masterful

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creatures from space could make him immortal.

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"Didn't you look at the bill of lading?"

"Not this boy. I was busy having one for the road. Last run and that kind of stuff, you know." Amos Peeks burped politely.

"Oh, Lord. I didn't realize it before. You're drunk, that's what you are."

"Nuh-uh," mumbled Amos Peeks. "Working off a drunk is all. What kind of statues?"

"Pull over and lemme drive, Amos. Please, Amos, huh?"

"What kind of statues?" Amos Peeks asked again, executing a wobbly turn again as he did so. Something heavy slid across the floor of the truck's trailer behind them.

"One of 'em come loose!" the partner cried. "Go easy, Amos."

Amos grinned. The windshield wipers cut pie-wedges across the splattered windshield. The motor purred and roared as Amos floored the gas pedal. They boomed out on a level stretch of highway.

"Now, Amos—" began the partner.

Just then something dazzling flared in front of the truck. Amos Peeks jumped on the big brake pedal with both feet, muttering, "Now what the hell is that?"

It was a good question.

The dazzling something glowed softly now. It had come down on the highway and it was disc-shaped and it was as big as the truck Amos Peeks was driving recklessly through the rain. It was pulsing now as the truck lurched to a bone-wrenching, statue-breaking stop half a dozen yards from it. It was disc-shaped and Amos Peeks' first thought—it also turned out to be his last thought—was of spaceships. But spaceships were not, in all the sensational magazines the now moribund Amos Peeks had ever read, blubbery.

For the thing which might have been a spaceship was soft, blubbery, like fatty flesh.

Amos Peeks pointed a finger and was on the point of saying, "Look," when the first wave of radiation from the blubbery disc engulfed the truck's cab. Instantly, Amos Peeks and his partner were dead.

Something big and roughly spherical came through the blubber of the disc-shaped thing. The blubber made a plopping sound and closed behind it. The thing, which was shaped like an elongated sphereoid with a point which managed always to stay on top despite the rolling motion, advanced toward the truck.

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The thing was an almost-sphere of marble-hard granite named Igzs. Igzs had come a long way across interstellar space to find a very disappointing w o r l d. He had scouted it, seeking life with no success, and had been on the point of returning home when his X-ray scanner had spotted apparently locomoting granite. Since Igzs' life form was granitic and Igzs' people had never encountered any other life form, protoplasmic or otherwise, Igzs was impressed. S t i l l, he thought now as he approached the big ungainly thing made of metal and various inert protoplasmic byproducts far less blubbery than the inert doorless protoplasmic shell of his spaceship, he had computed his orbit for home. He could only take a quick look, then depart.

He rolled forward and scanned the cab with his vision-receptors. The two strangely formed globs of protoplasm meant nothing to him; he passed them by and found what he was seeking in the truck's trailer.

Various shapes of marble.

Igzs rolled on, then levitated, then crunched through the protoplasmic byproduct—we call it wood—of the truck's side. He gazed upon—life.

But life in an apparently catatonic trance. He nudged the strange granitic shapes, which fell away from him at contact. He rolled on, nudging them some more. There was no response.

Dead? wondered Igzs. But what had killed them? His interior chronometer told him that he still had a few moments before blast-off or the bothersome necessity of computing a new orbit. He rushed back to the blubbery doorless spaceship and rolled through the wall, returning with a blubbery cube affixed to the point atop his body.

He re-entered the trailer rolling back and forth across its metal-ribbed floor, bathing the granitic shapes with radiation from his blubbery box. Then he rolled back to examine the fruits—but Igzs would have called them stones—of his labor.

The granitic shapes still seemed quite dead.

Igzs was disappointed. The radiation should have revived the strange life-forms, Igzs thought. Although, of course, there was no telling how life forms on an alien planet might behave. Perhaps it would take some time for the revivifier to take effect, Igzs told himself. Still, he was homesick. It would be many

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hours before Igzs could compute another orbit. He decided not to wait.

With another sad look at the inert granitic shapes which his revivifier had not brought back to life, but with hardly a glance at the similarly motionless protoplasmic shapes in the cab of the truck, Igzs returned to his spaceship. The protoplasmic shell parted to admit him, blubbering closed behind him.

Moments later, brightly glowing, the starship blasted off into the galaxy.

In three seconds it had left Earth's gravitational field. The strain of two hundred gravities thus imposed could not hurt Igzs' granitic body although it did temporarily change the shape of Igzs' protoplasmic spaceship harmlessly, proving to no one but Igzs that granite was the ideal stuff of life and protoplasm, of spaceships.

The state police found the truckload of statues the next morning. For a week or so there was a furor over the mysterious death of the two drivers. The autopsy showed a tremendous lethal dose of radioactivity, although no lingering radiation could be found. The statues were in due course delivered to the Metropolitan Museum which had been their destination.

No one ever brought up the subject of the roughly round, five feet in diameter gash in the side of the truck's trailer, which had been made as mysteriously as the driver had died—or as mysteriously as the ground in an area with a radius two hundred feet long had been fused as if by a minor atomic explosion occuring, perhaps, hundreds of feet overhead.

In their new home at the museum, the statues waited. Gathering strength.

The Clarepepper Exhibit—named for the sculptor Myron Clarepepper, recently deceased—proved a disappointment. Clarepepper's odd mixture of the classic and the abstract somehow failed to catch the public's fancy. Since Myron Clarepepper had spent twenty years on the twenty statues involved, it seemed a shame.

There were, naturally, exceptions. The gallery of the Clarepepper Exhibit was not always empty. Primarily, the Assistant Director of Museum Publicity, Albert Sprayregan, was the cause of those exceptions, and we shall return to Albert later.

On a Monday morning in

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May, fully two months after the Clarepepper Exhibit had been installed at the museum with disappointing consequences, Miss Dolores Ostigan of the Oyster Bay and Southampton Ostigans (forty million dollars in plastics and plastic rainwear) visited the gallery in which Myron Clarepepper's twenty statues had been ensconced. Miss Ostigan, whose parents had once invited the deceased but formerly bohemian and unpredictable sculptor to a cocktail party in their Oyster Bay home, considered it a duty to visit the Clarepepper Exhibit at least once. Miss Ostigan was pretty in a bluestocking sort of way, and notably graced with the best pair of hips and posterior to emerge from either Southampton or Oyster Bay in years. Miss Ostigan wore expensive dresses which were cut to make the most of this fortunate anatomic state of affairs and Miss Ostigan had developed a fluid, if proprietary, method of walking which did the same.

Harry Digger, the Metropolitan Museum's Chief of Security, who had stationed himself at the entrance to the Clarepepper Gallery that Monday morning in May because the guard was out with a late case of flu, noticed this. Harry Digger nodded a good morning to Miss Ostigan and studied her splendid posterior as she poured herself by him into the gallery.

But Digger was not the only one who ogled Miss Ostegan. The second ogler was perched on a granite pedestal in the Clarepepper Gallery. He was carved in white Vermont marble and, like two thirds of his brother statues in the hall, he was made in the classic manner, with the various anatomical features in their correct places, in correct number, and—as far as the Bohemian Myron Clarepepper had been able to make them—in admirable shape.

The statue, called Javeliner because he held a marble Javelin in one hand, was less inhibited than Harry Digger. Besides, the statue had no job at stake. After ogling Miss Ostigan, Javeliner whistled.

The bluestocking Miss Ostigan whirled, her face crimsoning but her heart brimming with secret delight. Actually, although Miss Ostigan had been given every opportunity of a Bryn Mawr education and forty-odd million dollars, she was a dull girl with no particular interests in life and no adequate personality or drive to pursue them, had she had them.

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The Clarepepper Gallery was empty. Had the guard whistled? wondered Miss Ostigan. No, it wasn't the guard. She couldn't even see the guard from where she was standing. The guard was too far away. Besides, she had noticed the words "Chief of Security" stitched on the left breast of the guard's uniform, and a chief of security wouldn't whistle at her, not even at her lovely posterior. Shrugging, Miss Ostigan looked at Javeliner on his pedestal. Javeliner wore the appropriate fig leaf. Javeliner was seven feet tall. Javeliner leered at her.

Miss Ostigan screamed, stumbling as she turned to flee. Instinctively, Javeliner bent to keep her from falling. But she had already righted herself and all Javeliner succeeded in doing was to catch the point of his marble javelin under the rear of her skirt. A grim and completely fortuitous tug-of-war ensued. Javeliner, naturally, could not lose.

Seconds later, her detached skirt now decorating the point of Javeliner's javelin, Miss Ostigan fled screaming toward the entrance to the gallery. With the covering of Miss Ostegan's delightful rear now reduced to panties and a somewhat tenuous slip, Javeliner couldn't resist one more whistle. Miss Ostigan screamed and sprinted. Realizing that he now had no choice, Javeliner—the first of the twenty Clarepepper statues to come to life—went into an instant freeze. But Miss Ostigan's skirt hung like a standard from the point of his javelin.

"There!" Miss Ostigan cried, pointing accusingly at Javeliner when she had returned to the gallery with Harry Digger. "You see? It has my skirt."

It had her skirt indeed. The skirt hung five feet off the floor on the point of the now upright Javeliner's short spear. Digger looked at the spear, looked at Miss Ostigan, and rubbed the back of his head.

"Don't just stand there," Miss Ostigan pleaded. "Do something."

At times like this Harry Digger wished he was back on the Metropolitan police force. He scowled and reached up without a word to tug at the skirt. It would not come lose. He tugged again and there was a tearing sound.

"My skirt!" wailed Miss Ostigan.

Digger finally got it down

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with a six inch tear up near the waistline. Miss Ostigan, now very pale, wobbled toward Digger, who obediently held out the skirt. In her haste to climb into the garment, Miss Ostigan entangled her legs in it, stumbling, falling and revealing tan, leg-filled nylons and a flash of white above them. Harry Digger tried to right her as she fell, but succeeded only in going down with her.

Javeliner guffawed.

Digger looked up, and received a resounding slap from Miss Ostigan, who thought the laughter had been his. Digger climbed to his feet. Miss Ostigan climbed to her feet and into the torn skirt.

Digger mumbled an apology. "The museum shall hear of this," Miss Ostigan said, walking stiffly from the gallery. Digger looked back at Javeliner. Javeliner wisely remained silent and motionless. But two of the other statues offered him tentative grins after the gallery was once more deserted. Javeliner grinned back at them.

Igzs, who might have explained all this, was now four hundred light years from Earth and would never return.

"The trouble with you, Albert Sprayregan," Sandra said, "is that you're not Irish enough."

"I am so Irish," Albert Sprayregan protested.

"Irish enough, I said. Why don't you ever get red in the face, or even holler? Why don't you take too much to drink, just once in a while, a little bit too much? Why don't you, specifically, toss an ugly job like the Publicity Director threw in your lap right back at him?"

Albert shrugged. "After all, I'm only half Irish. The other half is English, phlegmatic and—"

"And dull." Sandra looked at him. Albert had gulped, his Adam's apple going suddenly big. "I'm sorry, Albert. I didn't mean that."

"That's all right, Sandra," Albert said. He knew that Sandra Lewis liked him, strangely, unfathomably. It disturbed him enormously, if anything about Albert Sprayregan could be said to be enormous. Sandra was a pert girl of twenty-two with a well-formed and still slightly coltish figure and fluffy chestnut hair and an upturned nose and alert, somehow insolent eyes.

"But don't you see, Albert," Sandra pleaded. "Why do you think Mr. Hodd gave you that

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job? Because he knew you wouldn't turn it down, that's why."

"I have no right to turn it down. Mr. Hodd is my superior here at the museum and—"

"And what?" Sandra asked in exasperation. "And you haven't the guts to tell him you're a publicity man just like he is, not a—a detective?"

"You don't understand how the chief's mind functions, I'm afraid. Besides, did it ever occur to you I might *like* this particular job?"

"Like it? That's impossible!"

"I told you, Sandra. You don't know how Mr. Hodd's mind works. Look, we've had five complaints on the Clarepepper Gallery. Strange, inexplicable, as if—as if the gallery was haunted or something."

"Very funny," Sandra said as they finished their franks-and-beans in the museum cafeteria and went to work on their chocolate pudding. "Very funny."

"You don't actually think Mr. Hodd wants me to get to the bottom of the trouble, as he said. Do you?"

"Gilbert Hodd is a very literal man."

"Well, not this time. Getting to the bottom of the trouble, if any, is Harry Digger's job. What Mr. Hodd wants is—"

"Publicity? Albert, do you really think so?"

"Of course I think so," Albert told her, relieved that she was beginning to see things his way. He always found arguing such an unstabling influence. It could leave his stomach in mild turmoil for days. But then, Sandra Lewis could do that on general principles. She was fond of him. She was fond of him inordinately and she did not hide it and Albert Sprayregan did not consider himself ready for that sort of thing. Although Albert admitted it to no one, not even to himself, he had a fondness for the fair sex on an abstract level. If his unconscious mind permitted this abstract fondness to become concrete, Albert might find himself a veritable roué. Instead, his unconscious mind projected the abstract fondness on harmless particulars —such as the abstract statues Albert liked so much.

"Don't you understand," Albert went on, "what all this is about? Mr. Hodd is Museum Publicity Director, right?"

"Right," Sandra admitted somewhat reluctantly.

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"And I'm one of his assistants, just as you are. Now, the museum pays half a million dollars to get the Clarepepper statues and—what happens?"

"You tell me."

"They're a failure. They just don't draw anybody. Then an important society bluestocking—you'll excuse the expression — loses her skirt in there. A little girl is scared out of her wits. An old man insists one of the naked marble ladies winked at him. A boy gets his nose bloodied after trying to carve his initials into the calf of Javeliner with a pen knife. A—"

"I read the reports."

"Harry Digger is desperate. If there's prankster, he's got to find the prankster or they'll have to close the exhibit. But do you think Mr. Hodd is desperate? Maybe he acts like he is. He's got to. But actually, Sandra, he's delighted. I'm loaning you to Harry Digger, Albert, he says. Digger can't spare a man for full time duty in the Clarepepper Gallery. Digger—"

"So he can spare you, is that it, Albert Sprayregan? Sprayregan, the expendable."

"Not at all," Albert said calmly. "Digger will think I'm there to help him, don't you see? To put an all day watch on the Clarepepper Gallery. But actually, although he didn't come right out and say it, Mr. Hodd wants me to—to gather material for publicity purposes. Don't you see, Sandra? If we can convince the public that something funny really is going on in the Clarepepper Gallery, if we can convince them of that, they'll come to see it in droves and the Board of Directors, whose appropriation next fiscal year will be cut almost to nil because of the Clarepepper fiasco, will have the publicity department and Albert Sprayregan to thank for their salvation."

Looking at her face, Albert could tell that Sandra was impressed. Naturally, though, Sandra would be the last one to admit it. She said, "Have it all figured out, don't you?"

"Well, yes. You must admit I have a good grasp of museum politics."

"Albert, isn't there anything that matters to you but the museum?"

"We," Albert said, standing up and depositing their dirty dishes on one of the pick-up-counters, "are employees of the Museum. We have a mission. We—"

"Oh, Albert, sometimes I—"

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"There you are, Sandra," a brisk baritone voice called. A tall figure cut through the cafeteria line and stood in front of them suddenly, beaming. It was, Albert knew although he had never been introduced, Lawrence Chenault, an archaelogist on the museum staff recently back from a trip to the Near East. They were calling him a second Lawrence of Arabia, Albert recalled. He smiled secretly: the phrase had been of his own invention, had gone out to the newspapers and wire-services in an article he had written. Chenault was an imposing young man, handsome, over six feet tall, with shoulders like a fullback and a walk like Poppa Lion. Sandra's smile as he took her hand was almost demure—an amazing thing for Sandra's smile.

"Hello, Larry," she said.

"How's the girl, Sandra?"

"Larry, I'd like you to meet Albert Sprayregan. Albert, this is Larry Chenault. You know," she said, giving Chenault a second demure smile, then making it coy at the end, "the second Lawrence of Arabia? You've undoubtedly heard of him."

"Well, I don't know about that," Chenault said with false modesty, flashing white teeth against a sun-bronzed face.

Chenault was still holding Sandra's hand. Sandra seemed quite pleased and unexpectedly, Albert could feel his weak stomach beginning to flutter. Jealousy, he wondered. Impossible. He never had felt *that* way over Sandra, so it couldn't possibly be jealousy. Probably it was the franks-and-beans.

"If you'll excuse us," he heard Sandra saying, "Mr. Chenault and I have a new press release to discuss. See you later, Albert."

He watched them walk away, still holding hands. Shrugging, he took the elevator to the fourth floor and Harry Digger's office. "You just watch," Digger told him. "Remember this: you ain't a Security Officer. Anything funny happens, you report it to me. Got it?"

"But you don't really expect anything funny to happen. Do you?"

"I give up trying to figure this one out," Digger admitted with some reluctance. He was a short stocky man, balding, with a squarish face and close-set eyes and a chin like a sledge hammer. "Well, good luck, Sprayregan. Hell of an exhibit, ain't it?"

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"What? Oh, you mean the Clarepepper Gallery?"

"Yeah. Where you'll be stuck the next few days."

"Oh, it isn't bad. It isn't bad at all. Confidentially, I've always been an admirer of Myron Clarepepper. You see, the way he has managed to combine the classic with the modern and abstract in a grouping of twenty pieces has always—"

"Well, that ain't my department. Just keep a weather eye, is all. Right?"

"Right," said Albert, and went downstairs to where the Clarepepper Gallery was sandwiched between Pseudo-Michelangelo and Post-Athenian Greek.

Where the Clarepepper statues, all of them sentient now, were waiting for him.

"That jerk," Javeliner said after Albert's first full day in the Clarepepper Gallery. His vocabulary and his thoughts had been gleaned from the minds of the few visitors the Clarepepper Gallery had had. The epithet "jerk" had come from the mind of the boy who had tried to carve his initials in Javeliner's calf.

"The way he gawks," Javeliner said. "It ain't natural."

"He doesn't gawk at you, buster," Helen II pointed out.

"Not at you either," Javeliner responded. "He likes his dames abstract. Don't he, Flame Lady?"

Flame Lady, a shaft of virgin white marble in a single pure, flowing line which somehow gave an abstract suggestion of feminine sensuality and bright pulsing flame burning brightly together, said, "He certainly does. He's cute, though."

"Cute!" Javeliner cried.

"Well, I gave him a start today," said Flame Lady.

"I didn't see," Javeliner admitted. "Whatcha do?"

"I leaned over a little toward Albert."

"Albert? That's his name?"

"Yes, Albert. Everyday I'm going to lean a little closer until Albert realizes something is wrong."

Javeliner guffawed. "It'll knock him silly, kiddo."

"I really don't want to frighten him," the abstraction named Flame Lady said. "But one needs recreation, you see—"

"Don't have to tell me that," said Javeliner. "Just look around you, kid."

Flame Lady did so, although she had not been vouchsafed eyes. Still, she could somehow see—thanks to Igzs' magic. She blushed a delicate pink marble color. It

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was, naturally, not an organic blush. But the Clarepepper statues could blush when they wanted to blush. Blushing, according to what she had gleaned from the mind of their first visitor, Miss Ostegan, was quite appropriate at this moment, Flame Lady told herself.

For Helen II and Gladiator had come down from their pedestals and were cavorting brazenly around the Gallery. Then, even while she watched, Helen II giggled and Gladiator led her off into a dark corner of the night-closed Gallery.

"What's the matter, you a prude?" Javeliner asked Flame Lady.

"I'm an abstraction," Flame Lady said.

"You're evading the issue."

"Well, then—yes, so I am a prude. Why shouldn't I be a prude? Do you expect me to be ashamed of being a prude?"

"Hey, take it easy. I didn't mean nothing, Flame Lady." Javeliner seemed genuinely alarmed.

"Well, look at you. Arms and legs and everything. It's all right for you to talk about being a prude or not being a prude. But we abstractions—"

Just then Helen II came running back into view, with Gladiator in hot pursuit. Helen II was giggling as she ran and Gladiator closed the gap between them.

Flame Lady at that moment would have given anything to be an abstraction no longer. For, had she eyes she could have closed them. But seeing only in a general sense as she did, with every atom of her being, she found it impossible to shut out the shameful view of Gladiator and Helen II. And so the night passed, and, when dawn's pink glow came slowly to the gallery, even Gladiator and Helen II—or perhaps, most of all Gladiator and Helen II—were resting from the evening's activities.

Flame Lady thought dreamily: He's coming again today. He's coming. He—he adores me. I think he adores me. Like any statue or idol that ever had been, anywhere, Flame Lady loved being worshipped. Being an abstraction, however, she was not very sure of herself.

Secretly, Albert Sprayregan liked his new assignment. There was the reason he had given Sandra, but that was far from the whole story. For he also liked Flame Lady, and to himself he made no bones

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about it. Albert Sprayregan had always been inclined to place the fair sex on a pedestal of his own creation. This was not for any reason that the disciples of Freud might study and nod their sage heads over. No, Albert Sprayregan would hardly satisfy a Freudian. Instead, Albert was inclined to place the fair sex on a pedestal for a reason that had been missed entirely by the Freudians, probably because it was too obvious.

Albert was unsure of himself with women.

Afraid of women.

Placing them on a pedestal, they were not only untouchable and inviolate—*he* was untouchable and inviolate. Probably, his unconscious mind regretted this: he had a perfectly normal unconscious mind. But heredity had not given Albert the most robust of frames and environment had not endowed him with the necessary compensatory outlook. Albert was the wallflower type.

The slim white flowing supple smoothness of Flame Lady, her very graceful simplicity was, for Albert, the epitome of the fair sex on a pedestal. Oh, he could recognize the more obvious virtues of, say, a Helen II. Myron Clarepepper, the late and not particularly modest creator of the Clarepepper Exhibit, had proclaimed that Helen II was Helen with the numeral after her name only for chronological reasons. Actually, he had declared, from the point of view of pulchritude, Helen of Troy had nothing on Helen II. This certainly was debatable, but the fact remained that Helen II *was* an attractive hunk of marble. She was a high-breasted young lady with long limbs, supple thighs and a provocative smile on her pretty face that would have shocked the Mona Lisa.

It also shocked Albert. In his own words, it frightened him ever so slightly. Because Helen II, statue or no, was too real.

Flame Lady was different. Albert could stand at the base of Flame Lady's statue for hours, gazing up at her in rapt joy. Flame Lady was an abstraction—a harmless abstraction. In a way, it was nice to know that right now, this very minute, some unknown model wasn't getting up—brushing her teeth, perhaps, and gargling—a model who had posed for Flame Lady. Because, clearly, no one had posed for Flame Lady. Flame Lady was an abstraction.

So Albert paced slowly back

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and forth before her pedestal, every now and then looking up at her joyously. He was perfectly at ease. Not for a moment had he thought there actually were strange goings on in the Clarepepper Gallery. The strange goings on, such as they were, had been in the minds of the five individuals for whom they had transpired, Albert told himself. It was a logical assumption.

It also was, of course, perfectly incorrect.

Albert got the fright of his life on the morning of the fourth day. He had made his usual early morning rounds of the Clarepepper Gallery and found everything as it should be. He had taken up his stand at the base of Flame Lady's pedestal, from which point of vantage, looking straight ahead between Javeliner and Helen II, with a corner-of-the-eye view of Gladiator, he could see the hallway outside the Gallery. Settled comfortably like that, leaning against Flame Lady's pedestal somewhat indolently, he glanced up at the abstraction.

He yelped.

Flame Lady was glancing down at him.

Or at least leaning down. Precariously. Way over, almost at ninety degrees. She straightened quickly, fluidly, when she became aware of his glance—but she was too late. If anything, that was even worse. Now Albert had not merely seen her out of position, he had seen her return rapidly to it—via locomotion.

Albert's second reaction—following the yelp of astonishment—was subjective. Well, that's it, Albert old boy, he told himself. You're off your trolley, your rocker, or whatever people get off of. Naturally, you imagined all this. Perhaps it was a subconscious wish, coming to the surface.

Albert's third reaction was defensive and objective. I am not nuts, he told himself. I saw the statue move, apparently of its own accord. Since statues do not move of their own accord, this must be some trick of the eccentric sculptor, Myron Clarepepper. Albert, who was not very mechanical, supposed that Clarepepper, had he wanted, could have placed an electric motor of some sort inside the marble of Flame Lady's body. As a practical joke? Yes, Albert decided, the eccentric Clarepepper could have done something like that.

The publicity aspects of the situation came to Albert at

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once. Not statues, but robots, if Clarepepper had so mechanized all his creations. Of course, Albert would have to be sure. To suggest such a thing only to find it was the figment of an overworked imagination would invite scorn, ridicule. So Albert would have to see for himself.

That meant waiting patiently all day and admitting himself to the museum at night, waiting again until he was certain that the watchman was not on the third floor . . .

At closing time, after a day which had seemed interminable, Albert met Sandra Lewis at the main exit. "Oh, hi," Sandra said. "I was looking for you, Albert. Larry is showing some films of his latest trip to Saudi Arabia tonight. Want to come?"

"No," Albert said quickly. "Not tonight. Thank you, no." He hastened to walk on.

Sandra caught up with him on the broad staircase. "I thought you'd like to take me," she said petulantly. "Of course, if you have other interests—"

"It isn't that," Albert said.

"Then what is it?"

"I—I'm busy. Museum work."

"That's even worse. That's all you ever think about, the museum. Well, let me tell you something, Albert Sprayregan. I'm going there tonight. To Larry Chenault's place. To his apartment. His bachelor apartment. And you want to know something? Larry's going to ask me to stay on for—for a drink or something, after the other guests leave. You know what I'll tell him? I'll—tell him all right. That's what I'll tell him, Albert Sprayregan."

Ordinarily, this statement would have bothered Albert considerably although he would have been at a loss as to why. But now, his mind so occupied with thoughts of Flame Lady and the motor which might be hidden inside her beautiful marble lines, he hardly heard Sandra's words. Absently he muttered, "Ummm, yes. That will be very nice, I'm sure."

Sandra, who had fallen into step with him, stopped dead in her tracks and watched him go on. The exasperated look on her face faded quickly, however, as Lawrence Chenault came up behind her. She allowed him to take her arm, but her eyes followed Albert's form as it disappeared in the rush-hour crowds outside.

It was very dark on the third floor of the museum.

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Albert had a flashlight, but did not dare use it. At least not yet, not until he was sure that the watchman was elsewhere and had no intention of returning, at least for a while, to the third floor. With his shoes in his hand, Albert advanced across the tile floor. He knew every inch of the museum corridors by heart. He was abreast of Post-Atheenian now. Fifteen more strides—there! Now he stood directly outside the Clarepepper Gallery.

The watchman?

Albert heard footsteps above his head.

The watchman was on the fourth floor, making his rounds. Albert wondered how long he remained on each floor. He could time it, except that he did not know how long the man had been up there already. Well, it really didn't matter. He hardly needed more than a few minutes to find out if Flame Lady had a motor inside her or not.

The more he thought of it, the more foolish it seemed. Perhaps, he told himself, it *had* been his imagination. Well, he would soon find out. He. . . .

Abruptly, he was aware of steps on the marble staircase beyond Pseudo-Michelangelo. He flattened himself against one wall of the wide entranceway to the Clarepepper Gallery and waited. The watchman came on slowly. He was whistling tunelessly between his teeth. His feet shuffled.

Albert could see him quite distinctly against the faint hallway light as he came on into the Clarepepper Gallery. After he had passed, Albert looked at the luminous dial of his wristwatch. He timed the watchman's stay with the Clarepepper statuary. It was ten minutes. Ten minutes for each gallery on the floor, five galleries on the third floor, five more on the second, ten on the first, plus time to get from gallery to gallery and floor to floor—why, it would be some three hours or better before the watchman returned this way, not even counting another trip to the top floor.

Albert had all the time in the world.

When the watchman had drifted on down to Post-Atheneian, Albert, shoes in one hand and flashlight in the other, marched resolutely into the Clarepepper Gallery.

"Freeze!" a voice said in a loud stage whisper.

It startled Albert. It startled him so much that he snapped on the beam of his flashlight and played it quick-

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ly around the Gallery. He blinked. The bright yellow beam of light momentarily was dazzling. In the split-second it took his eyes to adjust, he *thought* he saw motion.

Not just motion from Flame Lady's pedestal.

From all the pedestals.

As if all twenty Clarepepper statues, the thirteen classic and the seven abstract, had made a mad dash to return to their pedestals from the floor before Albert could see them.

Albert's first impulse was to run. This was impossible. More than that, it was frightening. Statues, very definitely, could not climb on and off their pedestals at will. If they did, they either violated all the natural laws pertaining to statues and pedestals or at least to inert marble, or else they indicated a tragic shortcoming in the mind of Albert Sprayregan. Said shortcoming, he told himself, simultaneously deciding *not* to flee, of two possible forms. Either Albert Sprayregan had never known that statues could indeed leave their pedestal at will and often did so as a matter of course at night, or Albert Sprayregan had imagined all this and was nuts.

Albert probed a little unsteadily with his flashlight beam. It found and held Flame Lady waveringly. It had to be Flame Lady, of course. Most of Myron Clarepepper's creations were female and Albert could sooner see himself climbing all over a marble abstraction like Flame Lady than one of the others. There were several other abstractions but these had angles and sharp jutting points and other items on which Albert could have snagged his clothing as also had each of the non-abstract male statues, like Javeliner with his javelin and Gladiator with his sword. Flame Lady was the most likely candidate and Albert was still looking for buried electric motors after his first fright had gone.

He mounted Flame Lady's pedestal with some slight difficulty after shutting off the flashlight and clipping the instrument to his belt, thus plunging the room into darkness. He reached up along the smooth abstraction that was Flame Lady's body, searching with his fingers for a handhold. He could find none. He wondered if he could use his knees to shiny up Flame Lady, like he had climbed trees as a boy. He decided to try, since the likely place for

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an electric motor seemed to be what passed for Flame Lady's head.

He encircled Flame Lady with calves and forearms. Grunting, he started up.

"I really must insist," a voice said, "that you stop this at once."

Albert almost fell off. He righted himself on Flame Lady's pedestal and croaked, "Who said that?"

"Freeze!" came the same stage whisper.

But the other voice, the woman's voice, said, "If you must know, I said it."

The voice came from directly above Albert's head, from where Flame Lady's head—or what passed for her head—should have been in the darkness. He checked an impulse to use his flashlight again. Hearing Flame Lady was bad enough: he didn't want to see her talking, at least, not until he grew used to the idea and not until his heart stopped its loud thudding.

"I didn't know statues can talk," Albert said lamely after the silence had been as frightening as anything else. He would have cheerfully fled, except that fright had frozen him to the spot.

"I don't know about statues," Flame Lady said. "But we can talk. We Clarepeppers." She used the sculptor's name as if it was the family name of all the statues in the Gallery. "And I certainly won't remain quiet when my most obvious rights of privacy are violated," Flame Lady sniffed. "I don't mind being admired—from a distance, I like to be admired. Worshipped, you know. All statues do. But coming up here and hugging me is something else entirely, Mr. Albert Srayregan. You can be my devoted subject, but it ends right there."

For Albert, strangely and unexpectedly, disappointment conquered fear. In theory, he agreed with the prudish Flame Lady, but in practice, he did not. That is, he told himself, it was the function of an abstraction of feminine loveliness like Flame Lady to attract. If said attraction led to what seemed a logical outgrowth—although this had not been in Albert's mind at all—the attracting statue ought to be ready to suffer the consequences.

In short, a lovely female statue—abstraction or no—oughtn't to be a prude.

"Why don't you shut up?" the stage-whispering voice said. It came from behind Flame Lady and to the left, where Javeliner was located.

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"Why did you have to open your fat mouth and talk?"

"I don't have a mouth," said Flame Lady.

"Your abstraction of a mouth. What the hell's the difference? Now he knows about us."

"Well," said another voice, a delightfully throaty voice from the direction of Helen II, "I wouldn't mind it if Albert Sprayregan or for that matter any other man of flesh and blood decided to violate my pedestal. I'm growing tired of old granite puss over there."

"Thanks a lot," Gladiator said sarcastically.

"What do you say, Albert?" Helen II asked. "Just a little bit, Albert?"

On impulse, Albert reached for his flashlight, unclipping it from his belt and snapping it on in one motion, and bringing it up to point at Helen II. He staggered back. He almost had to clutch Flame Lady for support, but remembered her injunction in time and managed to regain his balance without her help.

Helen II was leaning toward him from her pedestal, her arms extended invitingly, her marble lips parted, warm flesh tones almost seeming to color her stark white nudity. "Well, Albert?" she coo'd, unabashed in the flashlight's beam. "Aren't you going to come up on my pedestal?"

Albert stammered something which hardly passed as an answer. Helen II pouted and said, "If you don't come up here, I think I'll come down there after you."

"Up *here*, you mean!" cried Flame Lady. "But I dare you to violate my pedestal. I just dare you!"

"But I thought you didn't want Albert."

"Only as a worshipper. But I won't surrender my acolyte to the fleshpots of—of—"

"Fleshpots, me?" laughed Helen II. "A statue, just like yourself."

"Now girls," said Javeliner.

"Don't you now girls us," Helen II told him. "You statues of men had your chance. Look at you, all of you. Look at Gladiator."

"What's wrong with me?" Gladiator demanded, and Albert gave him the benefit of the flashlight's beam, like the spotlight director of a show. Gladiator actually seemed to expand his already immense chest.

"I'll tell you what's the matter," Helen II said promptly. "You don't know the meaning of love. Of real love. You just play at it because you think

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you're supposed to. But you're too interested in—"

"In being a Gladiator?" Gladiator demanded. "But that's ridiculous. I've never been in a gladiatorial contest in my life. They just made me look like a gladiator, that's all."

"—in posing," Helen II said coldly. "You didn't let me finish. All of you. All of you strut around like marble peacocks, that's what. Why don't you look at Albert Sprayregan, at a *real* man, a man of flesh and blood?"

Albert, so engrossed in the drama enfolding, almost found himself turning the flashlight on his own face. But that wouldn't do. It wouldn't do at all. For if he allowed Helen II to have her way. . . .

"Listen," he said, "how is it that you statues—well, how is it you came to life? Statues don't ordinarily. Do they?"

No one answered. No one seemed interested. Finally, Helen II said, "I told you if you didn't come here I'd go after you, lover boy."

Lover boy. The words so aptly did *not* describe him that Albert had to smile. Apparently capable of seeing in the darkness, Flame Lady huffed, "So you like that, do you? All right Albert Sprayregan, I'll look for another devotee." The pedestal quaked. Flame Lady leaned over, tilting herself and her pedestal at a precarious angle. Albert was deposited on the hard tile floor with an ungentle bump.

He still held the flashlight, its beam circling until it found Helen II. The beautiful statue was in the process of climbing down from its pedestal.

"I won't let you do it," Gladiator said jealously. "I won't let you throw yourself at him like that."

Helen II's response was laughter and the words, "Try and stop me."

There was a ponderous crunching kind of sound as Gladiator, hurt and indignant, came too quickly from his pedestal. He groaned and another statue voice demanded: "S'matter? Break something, kiddo?"

"I think I cracked my pedestal," sobbed Gladiator as he alighted on the floor.

"Keep away from me," Helen II cried.

"Yeah, kiddo," said Javeliner, "keep away from her. We had enough trouble for one night. I'm warning you, keep your hard hands off of her."

"Is that a threat?" demand-

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ed Gladiator, brandishing the shortsword in his right hand and the small round shield of marble in his left.

"You can call it anything you want," replied Javeliner, and came down heavily from his pedestal, javelin ready.

"Now, boys!" cried Flame Lady. "Why can't you keep this argument on the abstract level?"

Helen II tittered. "Let them fight. That's what I say. Right, Albert, boy? Just let them fight. While we—"

"Keep away from me," Albert heard himself saying. But he did not say it with much conviction. After all, Helen II *was* a statue. True, she wasn't an abstract statue like Flame Lady, but she wasn't flesh and blood, either. Made of marble, she was at least half way towards being an abstraction. She was, in short, exactly what Albert needed at the moment, although he did not know that. She wasn't all abstraction; she wasn't all concrete. She might, in one short moment, allow Albert to bridge the chasm which separated him from at least mild sensuality.

"Kiss me, Albert," she said.

Albert retreated slowly, backing against Flame Lady's pedestal. Flame Lady, now aloof and above it all, ignored them.

"Over my dead body!" cried Gladiator.

But Javeliner stood in his path. "Get back to your pedestal," he commanded.

The two statues met resoundingly, stood breast to breast, their weapons held but forgotten. Then Javeliner got his thick calf behind Gladiator's leg and shoved and Gladiator went down with a thud which all but shook the museum.

"Unfair, unfair!" another statue cried. It was Ay-rab, the one fully clothed statue in the Gallery. Ay-rab, in fact, had been a problem for the museum director. Ay-rab was a joke in marble. They did not want Ay-rab in the Exhibit, but the executors of Myron Clarepepper's will had insisted, within their legal rights, that Ay-rab must be included in the Gallery if there was to be any exhibit of the late Myron Clarepepper's work at all. Ay-rab was an Arab in flowing burnoose, an Arab with protruding teeth and a nose like a hawk's beak and no chin at all and round little close-set eyes and an idiotic smile. Ay-rab was also Gladiator's friend and admirer, and when he saw the big statue tumble over backwards he charged

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off his own pedestal and jumped on Javeliner from behind. "You can't do that," he told Javeliner, "to Gladiator."

Meanwhile, Helen II got Albert in her embrace. Albert no longer fought it. The wild, fantastic events of the night, he finally decided, not without some unexpected enthusiasm, ought to be capped by at least one tentative embrace with the amorous statue. Helen II hardly felt like a statue. She felt more like flesh and blood. She started kissing him but wound up being kissed by him. She clung to him and sighed. Albert forgot about Javeliner, Gladiator and Ay-rab. Albert went on kissing her. Abstractions had nothing on this, he thought. Absolutely nothing. And once, daringly, he shut his eyes and found himself imagining that Helen II was not Helen II, but Sandra Lewis. The thought stirred him delightfully and he went right on kissing Helen II until a second loud thud jolted the floor of the Gallery. Sighing, Helen II let Albert go. Albert drew away from her and used his flashlight. He was thinking, I'm a changed man now, I can sense it. I needed what Helen II could give me. I needed that kind of—well, courage. Courage to face the concrete, not the abstract. To realize that the abstract should never. . . .

The thought was sundered by Ay-rab.

Ay-rab was crying, "I'm broke! I'm broke, broke, broke!"

Ay-rab was not referring to any pecuniary state of affairs. Ay-rab who, like Gladiator, had been thrown by Javeliner, was on the floor of the Gallery. But Gladiator, shakily, had climbed to his marble feet.

Ay-rab would not. Ay-rab, indeed, was broke.

In six pieces. It was the head piece which had cried. The head piece had come to rest against the Ay-rab statue's pedestal, but now of course Ay-rab no longer occupied it. The chest piece was nearby. The torso and one of the legs were being studied morosely by Gladiator. The other leg and both arms rested against Helen II's similarly unoccupied pedestal.

"Faulty construction," Albert muttered. He was still, first and foremost, a museum man. "If Gladiator didn't break when Javeliner threw him like that, then Ay-rab shouldn't have broken either."

"It hurts," said Ay-rab's head. "It hurts, it hurts, it hurts."

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STANLEY HUNGERFORD, night watchman of the Metropolitan Museum, was in the process of taking his third drink from the hip flask which shared his lonely rounds with him, when Ayrab had his humpty-dumpty-like fall.

Hungerford and the bourbon were on the second floor of the museum, and directly below the Clarepepper Gallery in the Florentine School. Hungerford winced. The bourbon certainly carried a stiff jolt. But, he suddenly realized, the loud thud over his head could hardly be ascribed to the bourbon. After all, the bourbon wouldn't bring plaster raining down from the ceiling, would it? Reluctantly (in his seventeen years as night watchman at the Metropolitan Museum, Stanley Hungerford had only once had to defend the valuable art treasures against a prowler, and this in the form of a stray cat which had entered through the cafeteria ventilating shaft), Stanley Hungerford got to his feet, capped the flask of bourbon, returned it to a rear pocket of his trousers, and loosened the Police Special automatic in the holster strapped around his waist. The entire uniformed security force of the museum, including night watchman Hungerford, was so armed, but until now Hungerford had always taken the weapon as one of Harry Digger's little jokes.

He was almost stone sober when he reached the foot of the wide marble staircase. He was even a little afraid. He would have been very much afraid, except that the noise had come from the Clarepepper Gallery. What thief in his right mind, Hungerford thought, would want to steal any of those Clarepepper statues?

Then maybe, the still not entirely sober Hungerford decided grimly, he'd be dealing with a maniac. He reached the top of the stairs and drifted like a heavy-paunched shadow past the dark entrance to Pseudo-Michelangelo. When he reached the next dark unbarred doorway, the entrance to Clarepepper, he held a flashlight in one hand and the Police Special in the other.

Should he try stealth? he wondered. Not in his present condition, not when he had just got beyond the stage where walking a straight line might prove difficult. Boldness. He must try boldness.

Stanley Hungerford snapped on the flashlight, its beam

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flashing ahead of him into the Clarepepper Gallery.

"All right, you in there!" he cried.

The beam of the flashlight caught Helen II's pedestal. The pedestal was empty. It then caught in turn, the deserted pedestals of Gladiator, Javeliner and Ay-rab. There wasn't a sound except for Hungerford's loud burp, a nervous reaction. Someone, Hungerford told himself grimly, was collecting Clarepepper statues.

"I've got a gun on you!' Hungerford shouted into the darkness, regretting that he had not fled down to the first floor and phoned for the municipal police. "Come on out of there with your hands up or I'm—" his voice trailed off somewhat in the hope that this would not prove necessary— "coming in there after you."

The silence was the kind you could drown in. Stanley Hungerford sighed, wished he had been a day guard, and walked into the Clarepepper Gallery, swinging the flashlight back and forth slowly, trying to lift the curtain of darkness in the room. All at once, though, he remembered the light switch. Of course, Stanley old boy, he told himself, the light switch. They won't hide from you with a dozen king-sized fluourescents glaring down on them. He retreated to the wall and felt along it with his hand. Something prodded his paunch. Instinctively, he clutched out for it, dropping his Police Special, which he was not very accustomed to carrying. The gun clattered on the tile floor as Stanley Hungerford's fingers closed on something long and cold and tapering and hard. Like a spear—or a javelin. Stanley Hungerford moaned. His other hand found the light, clawed at it, snapped it on. Moments later, the fluorescents flickered, then brightened into a steady glow.

Two feet in front of him, incredibly, was the face of a statue. The statue belonged on one of the empty pedestals, but was now standing on the floor in front of Stanley Hungerford, ready, apparently, to impale him on a javelin of granite. The watchman could feel the sharp point digging for his gut. The statue's face, naturally, showed nothing, nothing.

"Don't kill me," Stanley Hungerford moaned.

The statue said nothing. Now the javelin began to hurt. In a daze, Stanley Hungerford became aware of

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other statues nearby. Then a voice, a human voice, cried, "Don't kill him, you fool!"

Stanley Hungerford fainted.

"Don't kill him, you fool!" cried Albert, sprinting across the marble floor in his stocking feet.

"Kill?" demanded Javeliner, still on the point of impaling Stanley Hungerford, who had slumped forward and down against the javelin. "What does kill mean?"

That stopped Albert for a moment. He came up and grabbed Javeliner's marble arm, yanking. The javelin came away from the watchman's paunch. The unconscious man fell to the floor and rolled over.

"Kill," said Albert. "Well, you know. To kill. To, er, make dead."

"I don't understand 'dead'."

"You were going to run him through with that javelin of yours. That would have killed him."

Javeliner brightened. "Oh, that's a new one to me. Say, wait a minute, pal. You mean like I deaded—"

"Killed."

"Killed then. Like I killed Ay-rab?"

"Well," said Albert, considering this. Not quite. You see, well—ah, I have it. If you did to a human being what you did to Ay-rab—if a human being broke into half a dozen pieces, a human being would die. But Ay-rab, being a statue, I guess, well—"

"Then you don't know either? Look, pal. All I wanted to do was scare the hell out of this bird, so he wouldn't spill what he saw here tonight. I'm still gonna do just that."

Albert shook his head. "You already have. If you hurt this man, that'll be the end of it. They'll hunt you down, they'll—"

"Me?" demanded Javeliner. "Or you? Because I'm just a statue. All I got to do is climb back up there on my pedestal, and—"

Just then Ay-rab moaned in the background. Or rather, Ay-rab's head, apparently capable of collecting the sensation of pain from his sundered and scattered parts, moaned. "Put me together again, please. It hurts—"

"There," Albert said triumphantly, "it isn't as easy as climbing back on your pedestal now. Because there's Ay-rab to think of. Ay-rab can't climb back."

"Is that a threat, pal?"

"Why should I threaten you? It's a fact."

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"Yeah, we'll think of something with Ay-rab."

"Such as what?"

"We—we'll put him back together."

"How? Do you know how?"

"Well — ah, it ain't so hard."

"That," said Albert, "is what you think. I happen to know something about the repairing of statuary, having nosed around this museum for years. However—"

"Howsoever," said Javeliner unexpectedly, "we still got the watchman to worry about."

Nodding, Albert kneeled near Stanley Hungerford's inert form. He found the flask of bourbon. He smelled the unconscious man's breath. "I'm going to hate myself for this," he said, taking out the flask, uncorking it, and carefully spilling a few incriminating ounces of the contents on Stanley Hungerford's shirt front.

"That'll make it official," Albert said, regret in his voice. "The watchman will have to keep quiet about tonight if he knows what's good for him. But anyhow, he probably will. From what's on his breath, he must have had plenty to drink. It won't be hard for him to convince himself everything that happened tonight was his imagination."

"Yeah, but Ay-rab—"

"I'm coming to that. Listen, I want two of you men—er, statues—to take the watchman down to the main floor, to the storage room, and tie him up in there. You can release him afterwards. All right?"

Javeliner nodded, then beckoned with his hand. Gladiator and Gray Flannel came up on the double and, after Albert had given them directions, carted the watchman away. "But listen to me a minute, pal," Javeliner told Albert. "You ain't talked about one thing."

"Which is?"

"What's in it for you?"

"Nothing, except I feel this is all my fault. If I hadn't come in here snooping, Ay-rab would be all right at this very moment. If—"

"You mean that?" asked the incredulous Javeliner.

"Of course I mean it. A man has responsibilities if he—"

"Then put her there, pal," said Javeliner, and proceeded to shake Albert's hand with a grip of granite. The bones crunched. Javeliner let Albert's hand go. It hung limply at his side. Albert massaged it with delicate care.

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Presently, Gray Flannel and Gladiator returned, the former clothed in a gray flannel, unpadded shoulder, Madison Avenue, three-button suit-jacket on top and, for a reason only the dead Myron Clarepepper would have been able to explain, a fig leaf below. Gray Flannel looked at Albert and shrugged as expressively as a statue could. "I know what you're thinking," he said. "I stand there on the pedestal and they all think that. Hell, man, I can't answer your question. Only Myron Clarepepper could have—" he said the name reverently. "But Mr. Clarepepper is dead. What it says in the publicity releases, though, is that Mr. Clarepepper wanted to show that we're all still savages at heart."

Gray Flannel said this so prettily that Albert did not have the heart to tell him that he, Albert, had written those publicity releases. Then Javeliner said,

"What now, boss?"

"Me?" said Albert.

"Yeah, you. You're running this show, aincha? We got the watchman stashed away now. So, what gives?"

"Ay-rab," Albert said. "We'll have to fix Ay-rab. Send Gray Flannel and Gladiator to the repair room, and —" Albert listed a number of items he would need to repair Ay-rab. "Also," Albert added, "I don't want all of you statues milling about like this. You never know what might happen, and the less of you there are off your pedestals, the less time it would take to return things to normal. Let's see now—we need Gray Flannel and Gladiator. We need you, Javeliner, as a foreman. But the rest of you—"

"But Albert, dah-ling!" protested Helen II.

"The rest of you," Albert said coldly, feeling suddenly, unbelievably masterful, "will have to return to your pedestals at once. At once, Helen, do you hear?"

Grumblingly, the dozen statues which had come down drifted back to their pedestals, mounted, and became immobile. All except Helen II. Arms akimbo, she surveyed Albert shaking her head slowly from side to side. "I," she said, "won't do it."

"You'll go back there, if I have to carry you back."

Helen II smiled coyly.

"Look, boss," said Javeliner. "Do they go down to the repair room, or don't they?"

"Of course," said Albert, and Gladiator departed with Gray Flannel. Albert returned

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his thoughts to Helen II and tried to outstare her. Since her eyes did not need to tear, he could not do it. But he felt a sudden, unexpected sense of power. Javeliner had called him boss. And, it was true. He was boss. Compared to Javeliner and the others, despite their great strength, Albert Sprayregan was a man of the world. Why, Javeliner, Gladiator, Helen II and all the statues knew no world but the Clarepepper Gallery. Except for the little they had gleaned from the visitors to the Gallery, their knowledge of the world depended almost entirely on what Albert could tell them about it.

That even went for the seductive Helen II. True, she instinctively knew how to use her sex appeal—but this very use had awakened Albert Sprayregan. From that moment on it was as if his attitude toward the whole world had changed. Placing femininity on a pedestal was now, somehow, unnecessary. Similarly Albert, who had viewed the world largely as a spectator, would be content to do that no longer. The thought, vague at first, clarified in him. Now, like a butterfly emerging from its cocoon, he was ready to participate—actively. And, he could start with Helen II, right here, right now.

"Helen!" he said.

His voice was different. He could sense it and Helen II could sense it.

"Yes, sir?" Helen II said timorously.

"Come here, please. Kiss me."

Helen II approached, a marble smile etching her lips. Naturally, that was exactly what she wanted. Kiss Albert Sprayregan, and he'd be putty in her hands. Besides, she wanted to kiss him. Strangely, there was a new aura of strength surrounding Albert, like an invisible nimbus. Without a further invitation, Helen II flung her arms around him. . . .

Albert responded instantly. Watching the duration and the thoroughness of the kiss, Javeliner's mouth dropped open. Helen II went as limp in Albert's arms as a living statue could get. Then limper, when he went on kissing her. . . .

Finally, when it was over, Helen II said dreamily, "I'll go back up there now. I—I'll do whatever you say."

"Then go back to your pedestal and—"

Just at that moment, however, Gray Flannel and Gladiator returned with two

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cartons full of repair equipment. Since the order had not been completed, Helen II gazed in rapt adoration at Albert and made no move to return to her pedestal.

Satisfied with what the two statues had brought, Albert went over to Ay-rab and examined the pieces. The damage was far worse than he had at first suspected. Ay-rab had not merely split into half a dozen large sections: there also were shards and splinters and chips of marble strewn all about. Albert got down on hands and knees and began collecting them. Ay-rab moaned.

"Does anybody know exactly what he looked like?" Albert demanded. "This is important. We've got to put him together accurately, or there'll be an investigation—which I'm sure you wouldn't want."

"Well," said Gladiator, "he was kind of all dressed up."

"You know," chimed in Javeliner, "like an Ay-rab. In a bernice or—"

"Burnoose," said Albert. "But that wasn't all, was it? Didn't our friend also wear a marble khaffiya with leather thongs, and a gallabaya under the burnoose—"

"Yeah," Javeliner admitted glumly. "But who remembers exactly what those things looked like?"

"The publicity pictures!" Albert cried, suddenly remembering the photos which went with one of his press releases. Then he groaned. Ay-rab had been taken so lightly, had been thought so little of, that the pictures did not include one of him.

"Help me, please," Ay-rab moaned in a very small voice.

Albert said, "We need an expert, someone who would know exactly how an Arab would dress in burnoose, khaffiya and gallabaya, someone who wouldn't make any mistakes—and we need him in a hurry."

He sat in a funk, lighting a cigarette and smoking it. He had no answer. He wished all at once that he could discuss the matter with Sandra. Sandra was so resourceful. Sandra—wait a minute, Albert Sprayregan, he told himself. That's a thing of the past. You're every bit as resourceful as she is, now. More so. You—

Sandra. "Sandra!" he cried in sudden delight.

"What's up, boss?" Javeliner wanted to know.

"Sandra," he went on, thinking out loud. "And Lawrence Chenault. I called

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him Lawrence of Arabia. He's been there. He's an authority. He knows. He knows, if any man does."

"You O.K., boss?" Javeliner demanded.

"I'm fine. I'm great," Albert said. And Chenault was home right now. Entertaining Sandra, Albert remembered. Well, Chenault would soon be entertained himself. . . .

Albert decided it would be safer taking Ay-rab and the repair equipment to Chenault's home than it would be kidnapping the explorer and bringing him here. He smiled and said, "Pick up Ay-rab's pieces and put them in a carton." Helen II gave him a piteous look. If she were a dog, she would have whined. "Oh, all right," Albert told her off-handedly. "You can come along, I suppose."

With the sundered Ay-rab and the repair equipment, Albert and his strange entourage headed for the hallway, the staircase, the great rotunda of the museum—and the streets of the city beyond.

"The world!" Javeliner cried in delight. "The real world at last."

Lawrence Chenault's roof-garden apartment was located on Park in the Seventies. The rent, Sandra told herself for the tenth time, must have been enormous. Apparently, archaeology paid off for Larry Chenault.

So far, it had been an entertaining evening. After his dozen guests had assembled, big, good-looking, worldly Chenault had completely dominated the conversation as drinks were served. Chenault was like that. He would, Sandra sensed, always dominate conversations. And this flattered Sandra because Chenault made her—if one could forget the films of Saudi Arabia and the entire Arabian peninsula—the center of interest. He made it seem as if the whole party had been brought together in her honor, made it seem as if the films would be shown for her private benefit, made it seem by turning the charm of his smile on her whenever he offered one of his frequent conversational bon mots as if his words were spoken for her ears alone.

The films were really something. Naturally, they showed Chenault to best advantage. Chenault striding manfully across the desert in what the English call a pith helmet and the Indians, a topi. Chenault upright in a bouncing, clattering, dust-spewing jeep. Chenault poking in the ruins

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of an ancient Arabian myrrh and frankincense trading city. Chenault riding on an ungainly camel. Chenault distributing largesse to a group of nomad tribesmen who had been of some obscure help to the expedition.

But there was more. Larry Chenault, Sandra had to admit, really had succeeded in capturing something of the flavor of the desert in his films, something of its bleak mystery, its fascination, its grim ageless story. And Chenault himself, adventurer-explorer - archaeologist - playboy, was something special. Maybe it figured for Chenault to hog so much of the film footage. Chenault, with his rich manly voice. Chenault, whose running commentary on the films seemed to be for her alone. Chenault, who saw to it that every glass—particularly Sandra's—was not empty for long as they watched the showing.

Finally, it was over. Or, it was over for Chenault's other guests. Somehow, he maneuvered Sandra into a position in which she found herself at his side, standing by the door as the other guests filed out. She smiled mechanically and nodded and made small talk, and once Chenault squeezed her hand. There was a faint buzz in her head and she realized—but it didn't seem to matter—that she had just a bit more to drink than she should have. What she needed was a good cup of strong, dark coffee.

"Well, my dear," Chenault said when the last guest was gone and the apartment door was closed and locked, "it has been quite an evening. Hasn't it?"

"Those films were really wonderful," Sandra said.

"I thought you would appreciate them if anybody would. Nightcap?"

"I really ought to be going home."

"Oh, surely one nightcap wouldn't hurt. It's only twelve-thirty."

"Only, the man says. I'm a working gal."

"Say," Chenault asked, changing the subject. "Did you ever hear a gamelan orchestra?"

"Gamelan? Is that Saudi Arabian?"

"Hardly. They play the gamelan in Bali. I was in Bali in fifty-one, you know, on work for the museum. I made a record of a gamelan concert. Until you get used to it, they say it sounds something like caterwaling. But once you have grown accustomed to the

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different set of harmonic values—"

"Really, I must be going."

"Oh, come now. Just one record, and a nightcap."

The evening *had* been interesting and Chenault *was* persuasive. Sandra knew she'd have felt guilty if she did not at least listen to some of the gamelan music. Besides, she admitted to herself, she was intrigued by the idea of a Balinese music. "Well, make the drink a small one," she said, and walked with Chenault to a sofa, and settled back while he found the record, placed it on the turntable, and went for the drinks.

Wisely, he played the strange gamelan music softly. Louder, it would have been, as he had suggested, like caterwaling. But softly, as he played it, was something else. Softly, one had to strain to hear the exotic sounds, leaning forward and listening intently and—

—And hardly becoming aware of a hand dropping across one's shoulder. . . .

"Really, Larry. I ought to be going."

"Nice, isn't it? The music?"

She noticed that the lights had been lowered, that—except for one small lamp at the far end — the large room was now in the darkness. She said that the music was nice. The arm was heavy, but not oppressively so, on her shoulder. The hand did things.

"Larry!"

"You're very lovely."

"Larry, it's later than I intended to—"

"The most beautiful women of four continents, the loveliest voices, can be ruined, utterly destroyed, their memories effaced, by the mere mention of fleeing time. We are here for but a short interval and we drift swiftly through the allotted time of our lives," Larry said dreamily, as if he had waited with these very words for this very moment. "We oughtn't to call attention to time's swift, bitter-sweet flight."

"You have a funny way of talking, Larry."

"Funny? You like it?"

"If anybody else would try to talk that way, no. But coming from you—"

"Sandra, I am going to kiss you."

The words were hardly a whisper rippled over the surface of the gamelan music. Sandra suddenly knew how a fish felt, drawn irresistably to the expert angler's bright lure. She said, "All right, Larry. But not now. You may kiss me—when we say good-

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night." He had earned that much, with an enjoyable evening, Sandra told herself. It was part of the mores of the 20th century American dating system.

"Goodnight," Larry whispered.

"But we—"

"You said, then I could kiss you."

Shrugging, and even smiling slightly at his persistence—and flattered for the attention shown her by a man-of-the-world, Sandra turned her cheek, somehow—foolishly—expecting a gentlemanly buss thereon.

The arm across her shoulder tightened. The hand came down. Soft, dreamy words were breathed in her hair. Lips found hers and clung there. . . .

She pulled away and stood up. "Larry, now really. I hardly know you."

"I feel as if I had known you all my life. And yet, and yet, Sandra my dear, as if—if indeed I had known you all my life—you would be something new and mysterious to me with every passing moment."

The record came to an end. The needle slid along the soundless but scratchy mid-record grooves. And the spell, all at once, was broken. The gamelan music, the party, the films, the darkness, Larry's strange way of speaking—all suddenly fell into place as part of an elaborate and worldly line. Even the liquor buzz in her head was part of the plan, Sandra knew. To put it bluntly, Larry Chenault was on the make.

Sandra walked stiffly from the sofa, across the high-pile carpet. "I'm going now," she said. "You needn't take me home. I'll find a cab. Thanks for—for an interesting evening."

"Wait!" Larry stood up dramatically, but did not come after her. "Your lips—your lips have seared their memory eternally on my heart."

From anyone else, those words would have sounded ludicrous. Only Larry Chenault could have put them across, but she wasn't going to admit that to him. She thought—she was wrong, of course, but did not know that—that if she could somehow deflate him at this point their relationship might become one of Platonic friendship. She said, "Oh, come off it Larry. We both know that's a line."

She smiled. "But I'll bet all the girls in Bali fell for it."

"We're not in Bali now,"

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Larry said. "We're right here, and you're very beautiful." Two quick strides brought him to her. He tried to kiss her a second time and now she fought him off. She was strong, but he was infinitely stronger—

She sobbed as his arms embraced her again. The sob became a small scream. Somewhere in the background, there was a discreet knocking sound. The discreet knocking became more insistent. She sobbed again. The knocking became a pounding. Someone —the voice was muffled— called her name.

The door burst open abruptly. Alabaster white figures filed in. Statues. And someone else, f a m i l i a r face. . . .

Sandra fainted.

Albert ran to her quickly and caught her before she could fall. He carried her carefully to Chenault's sofa, letting her limp body settle there. He chafed her wrists, her ankles. She stirred, but her eyes remained shut. She was breathing easily, though, and her color was good.

"Who are all these, er, people?" Chenault demanded.

Because Albert had not entered his apartment alone. With him were two boxes, one containing statuary repair equipment, including, f o r some odd reason, a man-sized sledge hammer, and the other containing the now sectioned Ay-rab. With him also were Javeliner, Gladiator, Gray Flannel and Helen II.

"We'll get to that later," Albert snapped. "You must feel like hot stuff, trying a stunt like that on an innocent girl who—"

"Really, Sprayregan. That is the name, isn't it?" sneered Chenault. "I don't see where it's any of your business."

Albert squared off in front of him. "Is that so! It is my business because—because—"

Arrogantly, Chenault held a well-manicured hand in front of an artificial yawn. "You see, there is no reason. And, as the expression goes, Miss Lewis is free and twenty-one. So, will you kindly take your convoy with you and get the big H out of here?"

"Not without Sandra."

"Oh, you can take her. With my good wishes."

"And not without you apologizing to her."

"R e a l l y, Sprayregan," Chenault said again. "That is something between M i s s Lewis and myself, don't you think? You do think, don't you?"

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Perhaps it was, Albert thought. Perhaps he had no business butting in. He certainly did have other things to do tonight, important things, more important things. But—were they? He could not quite put into words what he had in mind, but vaguely he could sense that this argument with Larry Chenault was the most important thing that had ever happened to him.

Why? He was not prepared to say why, not even to himself. Later on he could think about it, could crystalize it. Now it was enough to know that while he, Albert Sprayregan, could play man of the world to a bunch of naive newly-brought-to-life statues, that did not mean he could assume the role of worldly man among worldly men. Men such as Larry Chenault, the Sprayregan-styled new Lawrence of Arabia. In short, all the fantastic doings of this fantastic night would end in failure unless Albert Sprayregan could assert himself.

And besides, there was Sandra. Yes, there was Sandra. Indeed, there was Sandra. Even now, while the thoughts ran ramble-scramble through Albert's brain, she sat up and looked about herself in bewilderment.

She looked at Larry Chenault. And—and Albert! "Albert," she said. "Oh, Albert, you're here."

"Making a fool of himself as usual," Chenault said.

"I want you to apologize to the lady," Albert said.

Chenault laughed in his face.

Awkwardly, Albert tried to turn Chenault around and steer him in Sandra's direction. But the explorer balked and stood his ground and finally, when Albert seemed on the verge of surrendering to a stronger will and a stronger man, Chenault hit him.

It was, Sandra observed with the small part of her mind that could remain completely objective under the circumstances, not a very hard blow. But it was, coming as a complete surprise, hard enough. It upended Albert and deposited him on the floor.

"That's all right, Albert," Sandra said. "I know—I know you meant well."

"Meant well!" gasped the seated Albert. "Meant well," he repeated the words. His face looked suddenly, unexpectedly—fierce. Fierce was the only word Sandra could think of. He sprang to his feet.

Easily, effortlessly, Chen-

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ault knocked him down again.

"Hey, Albert," Javelin called. "Whatsamatter, Albert?"

Albert shook his head. And shook it again. He was seeing double, and it took several seconds for the annoying visual disturbance to subside. When it did, he became aware of Sandra looking at him. There was a tender expression on her face. Tender, yes. But full of—pity. Pity for him, for Albert Sprayregan, champion of the Clarepepper statuary, for Albert Sprayregan, a new man tonight. For Albert Sprayregan, who, if he continued in this uneven battle, would get the stuffings knocked out of himself.

And there was Javeliner and the other statues—looking at him. Javeliner, thoughtful. Thinking — but what was Javeliner thinking? What would a statue think? Disappointment, of course. To Javeliner, Albert had been something special. Albert had been The Boss. And to Helen II—Albert sighed. The disappointment on Javeliner's face was mirrored and magnified on Helen II's lovely countenance.

Albert got up a second time. Chenault knocked him down a third time.

He had hooked his left hand at the base of Albert's jaw. He was very good at it. Albert hardly knew any defense. Albert was no expert boxer, and apparently Chenault listed that among his many accomplishments.

"Hey, Albert," Javeliner almost groaned. "Jeez, I thought you would know how to handle yourself."

"You know something, Gladiator," Helen II said slowly, "I might have been wrong about you. Maybe we can have some fun together at that. Not in the museum, of course. Who wants to go back to the stuffy old museum? I mean, out in the great big world. What do you say?"

Gladiator eyed her lasciviously. "That, baby," he said, "suits me."

"But you've got to return to the Clarepepper Gallery," Albert pleaded—not very convincingly from his location on the floor. "You—you're statues. I know how you must feel about being cooped up but I'm sure we can work out some kind of compromise."

"Not with you, big shot," Gladiator said. Gray Flannel nodded firmly. Helen II avoided Albert's eyes. Javeliner looked befuddled.

Albert got up on his knees.

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He looked up at Chenault. Cocky, arrogant, waiting for him with a cocksure smile, Chenault seemed gigantic. Albert wished that somewhere along the line he had learned to box. Or to wrestle. Anything. Something. . . .

From his knees, he launched himself at Chenault's legs. This new form of attack took the explorer by surprise, and Albert, as much to his surprise as anybody else's, succeeded in flooring his antagonist. As they rolled over and over on the floor, struggling, Albert heard a happy sigh from Sandra and heard Javeliner cry:

"Attaboy, Boss!"

"Aw, he was just lucky," Gladiator said.

And it seemed that Gladiator was correct. Because Chenault fought his way clear and stood up. He was annoyed now. He looked angry. His suit had been mussed, and his hair, and there was a red bruise on his left cheek. "I'm going to teach you a lesson you won't forget," he said, waiting for Albert to climb to his feet.

Albert got up slowly. The room was spinning, spinning. He lunged at Chenault. Then he sat down again. He had been hit again, he realized. But except for a certain numbness in his head and the fact that he was once more on the seat of his pants, he had hardly felt it. That was the thing about fighting, he thought. From a distance, it looked fearful. From a distance, it looked like the pain of jarring physical contact was itself enough to finish you off. But it did not work that way. You fought, and you were hardly aware of being hit. If, for example, you could protect the vulnerable spots, the spots that, physiologically, could beat you, you might actually make a fight of it.

Albert climbed unsteadily to his feet. This time he guarded his jaw. This time he ducked his head, tucking his chin almost against his chest. This time he was ready—or, at least beginning to learn how to be ready.

He picked off two left hooks with his forearms, but then Chenault changed his attack and drove his right fist at Albert's unprotected belly. Albert doubled over slowly and Chenault rabbit-punched him on the way down.

This time he hit the floor with his face.

Chenault prodded him with an expensive, hand-stitched shoe. Albert, who could barely breathe now, rolled over swiftly and grabbed the ex-

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plorer's ankle, twisting. With an oath, Chenault came down on top of him. Albert kicked up with his legs, pretzel-bending his body and getting his heels locked over Chenault's shoulders. He lunged and Chenault fell over backwards, his head hitting the floor with a resounding thud. He got up. Albert got up. Both of them looked dazed and all but beaten. From this point, Albert told himself, we're about on even terms. They waded into one another, fists flailing. Albert knew how to protect himself now, face and gut. He took the best that Chenault could throw at him, and hardly felt the blows. That was it, he knew. That was the secret of fighting.

It was more than the secret of fighting. It was the secret of facing a hard, often hostile world. You did not give up. You did not nurse your hurts. You fought back, and if you fought back hard enough and honestly enough, the hurts were nothing. You never felt them until the fighting was over, and it was time enough to worry about nursing them at that time—provided you won. If you did not win, then it hardly mattered.

And Albert was going to win. He knew that now. He knew that there was a basic difference between him and Chenault. He knew that Chenault was fast and flashy, but that he had lasting power, finishing power. Chenault was unbeatable—as long as he was on top. But hurt him, baffle him, damage him—and you had him on the ropes.

Albert's entire head was numb from the blows it had taken. Numb, not painful. It might throb with pain later, but now there was no time for pain. Now it was only numb.

"Go get him, Boss!" cried Javeliner.

"Oh, Albert, Albert!" Helen II purred.

Albert waded into the faltering Chenault now. Right and left, right and left. Chenault's face looked bruised and ugly. Perhaps Albert's did, too, but Albert was smiling through the blood. He swung his arms, his dead-weight arms. He felt the bone-jarring thud of contact as his fists connected, felt the hardness of Chenault's jaw and cheekbones. Then, finally, he was punching air.

And Chenault, reduced to a battered, beaten hulk, lay at his feet.

"Albert!" screamed Helen II in delight, running at him.

He held her off at arm's length. "Keep away," he said.

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"No fraternization. I have a compromise worked out for you statues, and we'll talk about it later."

"Later?" said Javeliner. "Aw, but boss. . . ."

"Did you say statues?" gasped Sandra.

"We'll talk about that later, too," Albert told her.

"Oh, Albert. You're hurt. You're bleeding."

"That can wait, too. Get some water."

"Of course, Albert. Whatever you say, Albert." Sandra took the ice bucket, ran into the kitchen with it, returned sloshing water. "You want me to bathe your face, Albert? Poor Albert."

"No. Of course not. Give me the water, please."

Obediently, Sandra handed him the bucket. From his full height Albert poured the contents on Larry Chenault's face. Chenault spluttered, sat up.

"I have a statue here," Albert said. "Damaged. It's of an Arab and I want to make sure I put it together properly. I want your help. I also want you to promise you won't tell anyone, ever, about what you see here in this room tonight."

"You can take that statue," Chenault said, "and—"

Albert reached down and grabbed his tie, yanking the top half of his body up. "Do we have to go all through what we w e n t through, again?" he asked mildly but significantly.

Chenault's b r u i s e d face blanched. "No," he said. "No, please."

"Then you'll help us?"

There was a pause. Then Chenault said: "Yes. Whatever you want." And he meant it. He was beaten. You could tell it from his voice.

They worked on Ay-rab until the first gray dawnlight was seeping into the room. Finally, the statue was complete once more. Albert looked at it and nudged the now-haggard Chenault: "Well?"

"He's perfect," Chenault said unhappily.

"And you'll remember what you promised?"

Chenault nodded. "Hell, what choice do I have, Sprayregan? Apparently you're determined to keep these—uh, living statues, a secret. If you're determined, you're determined. There's no stopping you."

"Yes," Sandra said dreamily. "Isn't it wonderful?"

"But what about us?" protested Javeliner. "You can't expect us to stay put on our pedestals all our lives, can

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you? We'll go nuts. Give us a break. . . ."

"I have it all figured out," he said. "At night you're free to rove the museum. But not outside. You saw what a tough time we had coming here. That's the compromise. Is it a deal?"

"What about the rest of the world?" Gladiator demanded sulkily.

"Your world will be the corridors and hallways of the museum. It has to be that way," said Albert. "You understand. With absolutely no exceptions."

Ay-rab said, "I'm for Mr. Albert. Whatever he wants is plenty all right with me."

"Be reasonable," Albert told the others. "It's more than any statues before you ever had. Isn't it?"

"Yeah, but—" began Javeliner.

"That's enough," Albert said. "Take it or leave it."

Sandra smiled at him. "You bully," she said, teasing.

Javeliner finally shrugged his marble shoulders. "We better play ball, Boss. But not because you convinced us. You want to know why?"

Albert nodded.

"Because we wouldn't want to cross a guy like you, that's why. We'd have to be crazy even to try it. Right, guys?"

"Right," said Gladiator.

"I guess so," said Helen II.

Gray Flannel nodded.

"Well, that wraps it up," Albert said. "Larry, go down and get your car. We'd better hurry back to the museum. There's a watchman we'll have to free and take into our confidence. Under the circumstances, he ought to play ball."

"I'll get the car right now, Mr. Sprayregan," Chenault said, and took out a few minutes to clean his face, then left the apartment.

"*Mr.* Sprayregan," Sandra said. "That's what he called you."

Albert looked at her sternly. "As for you, young lady, don't get yourself into any more compromising situations. Understand?"

"Yes, Albert. I understand. Whatever you say, Albert."

"Maybe," Gladiator suggested, "you ought to keep her out of compromising situations."

"That sounds like a great idea, Boss," said Javeliner.

Albert looked at Sandra. She came close to him and snuggled against him. "Maybe it *is* a good idea," Albert said. But he only said maybe. Actually, he knew it was a great idea. **THE END**

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Amateurs Made Our World

A FANTASTIC QUIZ

"Stick to your last" may be good advice for shoemakers, but if the world's best-known inventors had conformed to this pattern, many of the technical marvels in use today might never have been developed. To show how many inventive geniuses functioned originally in unrelated fields we've designed a quiz based on the actual occupations of men whose after-hour inspirations have changed world history. Counting five for each correct answer, a part-time scientist should be able to score 75.

---

1. Bifocals were invented by a **publisher—glass blower.**
2. The cotton gin was developed by a **tutor—farmer.**
3. The process of vulcanizing rubber was discovered by a **blacksmith—hardware merchant.**
4. The man responsible for inventing the telegraph was a professional **engineer—painter.**
5. The first commercially practicable typewriter was the work of a **bookkeeper—editor.**
6. The man who made the telephone a reality was a teacher of **speech—physics.**
7. The microphone was invented by a **musician—store clerk.**
8. The stock-ticker was developed by a **banker—telegraph operator.**
9. One of the first submarines to sail beneath the seas was the spare-time work of a **school teacher—salesman.**
10. The movie projector became a reality through the efforts of an **actor—stenographer.**
11. The trade of the men who flew the first successful airplane was **electrician—bicycle mechanic.**

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12. The repeating rifle was the brainchild of a **country storekeeper —Indian scout.**

13. The kodachrome color process was developed by two **chemists —musicians.**

14. The first successful locomotive was invented by a **manufacturer—miner.**

15. The man responsible for the camera was a **theatrical designer —doctor.**

16. The man who developed the sewing machine to help his hard-working wife was an **unemployed tailor—machinist.**

17. The linotype machine was invented by an **engraver—watchmaker.**

18. Television as we know it owes much to the work of a man who once owned a factory for **canning fruit—making shoes.**

ANSWERS

1. *Publisher:* Benjamin Franklin—He had a considerable gift for scientific invention. 2. *Tutor:* Eli Whitney—He was studying law and running a Southern plantation school. 3. *Hardware merchant:* Charles Goodyear. 4. *Painter:* Samuel F. B. Morse—His paintings were highly regarded in his day. 5. *Editor:* Christopher Sholes—He was running a print shop and country newspaper. 6. *Speech:* Alexander Graham Bell—He knew little or nothing of physics. 7. *Store clerk:* Emile Berliner— His invention led to the development of the victrola. 8. *Telegraph operator:* Thomas Alva Edison—This was only his first successful invention. 9. *School teacher:* John P. Holland—He taught in a parochial school. 10. *Stenographer:* C. Francis Jenkins. 11. *Bicycle mechanic:* Wilbur and Orville Wright, of course. 12. *Indian scout:* Richard J. Gatling—He was also a teacher. 13. *Musicians:* Leopold Mannes and Leopold Godowsky—Photography had been a boyhood hobby of theirs. 14. *Miner:* George Stephenson—He worked his way up from miner to mining engineer. Locomotives were first used in the mines. 15. *Theatrical designer:* Louis Daguerre. 16. *Machinist:* Elias Howe—His wife supported him by sewing. 17. *Watchmaker:* Ottmar Mergenthaler. 18. *Canning fruit;* John L. Baird—His health forced him to retire from business.

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BY THE READERS

Dear Editor:

Not one dull moment with "A Pattern For Monsters." I simply adore this sort of a story, although I'm not any too hot on the author.

Idea, now. Try to get Garrett to do a serious collaboration with James Gunn. You might produce or publish something great for us then.

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

• *Look, James, if you thought the story was terrific, you just have to have a soft spot for the author. As a matter of fact he's a real nice fellow. To know him is to love him (it says here).*

Dear Editor:

Can't find a thing to complain about except that I wonder if what Kent Moomaw calls "brass-bra'ed beauties" are really necessary on the cover.

Some opinions to add to your statistics: it would be too bad to turn down all stories that are too long to go into one issue, so it probably is a good idea to put them into a separate book. Many stories require length for proper development.

I like your readers' letters column and particularly your custom of printing addresses. It has enabled me to write to some

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interesting people. I am in favor of printing as many letters as possible as long as they say something. I enjoy corresponding with s-f fans who have ideas they would like to kick around by mail.

The cartoons are good and I am in favor of your idea of a cartoon gallery.

May I cast the strongest possible vote for the digest size? It is convenient to carry and handle. I agree with Andrew Reiss that your comments could be longer, but disagree with his implication that the stories used to be better. This thought has some connection with the "sense of wonder" that some think to be lost. When we were first given s-f literature everything was wonderful, but as we grow older and more experienced we gain a sense of discrimination so that writing has to be better and better. Charles Dickens had something new at the time and of course he was a gifted writer, but I wonder if we would put up with his verbose style today?

This reader much prefers stories like Hal Clement's "Mission of Gravity," in which the science is genuine. But this sort of stuff is hard to find, so I will be happy with the best you can find to give us. Up to now you have been doing a good job and I hope you can keep it up.

Floyd W. Zwicky
913 Fourth Ave.
Rockford, Ill.

• *Thanks for the very fine letter, Floyd, and do come again.*

Dear Editor:

I have decided to begin a crusade. This thing I am crusading for (or against, it all depends on how you look at it) is as follows: I have decided that Valigursky and his Bergyish drawings are here to stay and there is nothing I can do about it. I am, however, set against certain things in your magazine. I have nothing against "It Sounds Fantastic But . . ." since this can have some relationship to s-f or fantasy, but I cannot see the reason for "Around The World In Twenty Questions." This bears no relationship to s-f and has no place in a s-f magazine. With the extra space you can elongate the readers column.

A comment on the "Higher Education Dept." that appeared in your editorial. In this you refer to Marigold Sandwiches, an

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item that was in "Fantastic But True . . ." What are those? That's about all I have to say on that subject.

Andrew Reiss
741 Westminster Road
Brooklyn 30, N.Y.

● *We can't help you much on the Marigold Sandwich thing, but perhaps if you write to John Wagner & Sons, Philadelphia, they may be able to help you.*

Dear Ed:

I make the Explorer's Club and you don't. In the June issue of *Fantastic* you put Midway Island closer to the Equator than Wake Island. If you were a navigator we would have our terrestial ship orbiting Mars on the way to the Philippines.

I peeked at the answers and bet my roommate five guilders on Midway. Well, he whipped out his 'ole Atlas and knocked me down a peg or two. I had implicit faith in your magazine and you let me down.

So here I sit laughing on the outside, crying on the inside, reading your magazine . . . and I like it! I read every issue and eat up the exotic adventure.

R. A. Sullivan
Leverett C-32
Cambridge 38, Mass.

● *You're one up on us, Mr. Sullivan. We're crying on the inside and the outside too. Glad you still like us, though. Hereafter we'll live up to your faith.*

Dear Editor:

This issue of *Fantastic* is up to par. Garrett's "Pattern For Monsters" makes me pause and look down dark alleys. The others all seemed like true confessions, except "Deadly Honeymoon." That made me laugh.

Don't you think this incredible powers kick is being overworked? You have had it for four issues. Get some good fantasy like *Fantastic* and put it in *Dream World* too.

Donald Kent
3800 Wellington
Chicago, Ill.

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• *Maybe the answer is to find some even "incredibler" powers, Don. We're wracking our brain right now!*

Dear Editor:

I thoroughly enjoy reading your magazines. I have no gripes about any of the stories. The ones that were tops on my list for this month were: "A Pattern For Monsters," "The Secret Of The Shan," and "Attic For Rent."

I expect to read many more interesting s-f stories in your books.

Harold Prosser
1313 South Jefferson
Springfield 4, Missouri

Dear Editor:

The June issue of *Fantastic* was great. Every story was a hit. Especially "A Pattern for Monsters" which would make a swell s-f suspense movie.

The features are always interesting.

I should say it's good news that Hollywood is looking into *Amazing* and *Fantastic* stories. From all the stories put out by you there is undoubtedly an untold wealth of future science fiction movie material.

W. C. Brandt
APT. N
1725 Seminary Ave.
Oakland 21, Calif.

⊙ *We have a hunch "Pattern . . ." may be picked up by Hollywood any day now.*

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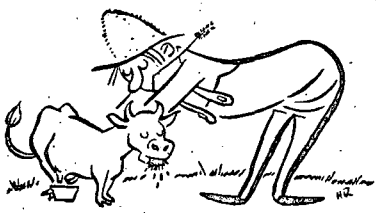
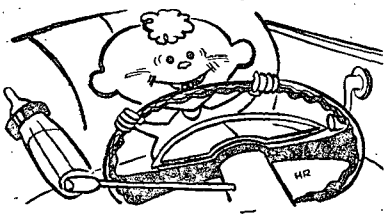


Five-year-old John Charles Percival Pocklington of Lincolnshire, England has been driving an automobile on his father's farm ever since he was three and one-half years old.



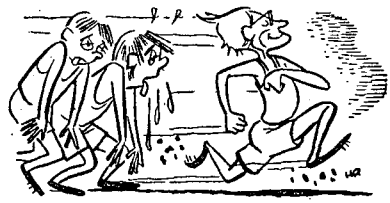
In 1811 Sir John Throckmorton, landowner of England, won a bet of 1,000 guineas that he would wear a coat for dinner in the evening that had been growing as wool on his sheep in the morning. The sheep were sheared at 5 A.M.; Sir John dined at 6:30 P.M.

John Lemay of Montreal was recognized as the pipe-smoking champion of Canada when he won a contest by keeping 3.3 grams of burley alight in his pipe for 70 minutes and 30 seconds.

Ned Kearney, one hundred and three years old, and his wife Rose of Memphis, Tenn., aren't sure just how long they've been married but they have a son over eighty so figure it's at least 82 years.

El Mokri, Grand Vizer of Morocco, with a reputed age of 107, was universally recognized in 1955 as the world's oldest living statesman.

Joie Ray of Champaign, Illinois, celebrated his 62nd birthday by running a mile in 6 minutes and 23.4 seconds. Ray has the distinction of having run in more competitive races than any other American, living or dead.



R. S. CRAGGS

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continued from Back Cover

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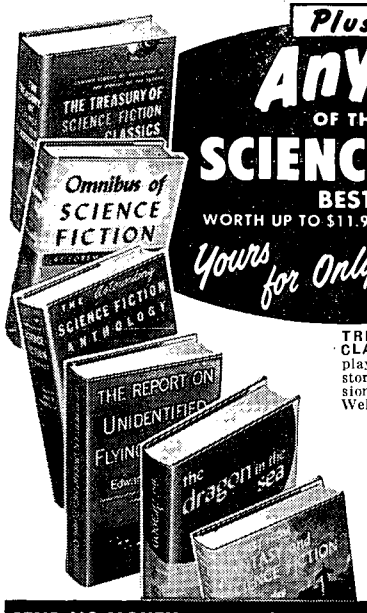

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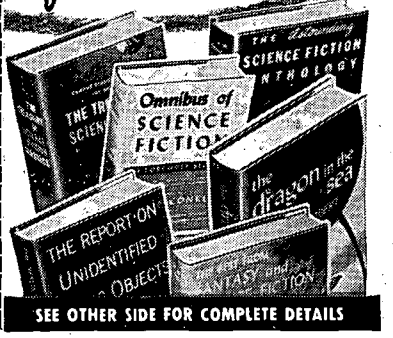
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